The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Who was Josephine Herbst? *by Hilton Kramer,* 1

Ivy Litvinov: the commissar's wife
by Samuel Lipman, 15

Watteau in Washington *by Jed Perl,* 27

Millet in Boston *by Dan Hofstadter,* 34

"Sackets Harbor, 1866" *a poem by Herbert Morris,* 41

Theater: Making something out of nothing *by Mimi Kramer,* 50; **Art:** Vienna in Venice *by Ewa Kuryluk,* 55; An Australian accent? *by Eric Gibson,* 60 **Books:** *Paul Fussell* Class: a guide through the American status system *reviewed by Mimi Kramer,* 64; *Philip Larkin* Required writing: miscellaneous pieces 1955-1982 *reviewed by Donald Hall,* 73; *Denis Donoghue* The arts without mystery *reviewed by Roger Kimball,* 76; *James Fenton* Children in exile: poems 1968-1984 *reviewed by Robert Richman,* 80; **Notebook:** William Empson: a tribute *by Cleanth Brooks,* 84; "A certain air of seriousness" *by Bruce Bawer,* 88

Volume 3, Number 1 *September* 1984

$3.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CARMEN CICERO

PAINTINGS
AND
DRAWINGS
1975–1984

SEPT 20–OCT 20

GRAHAM MODERN

1014 MADISON AVENUE AT 78TH
3RD FLOOR, NEW YORK CITY
(212) 535-5767

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tony Berlant

New Work

September 20–October 20

Le Corbusier

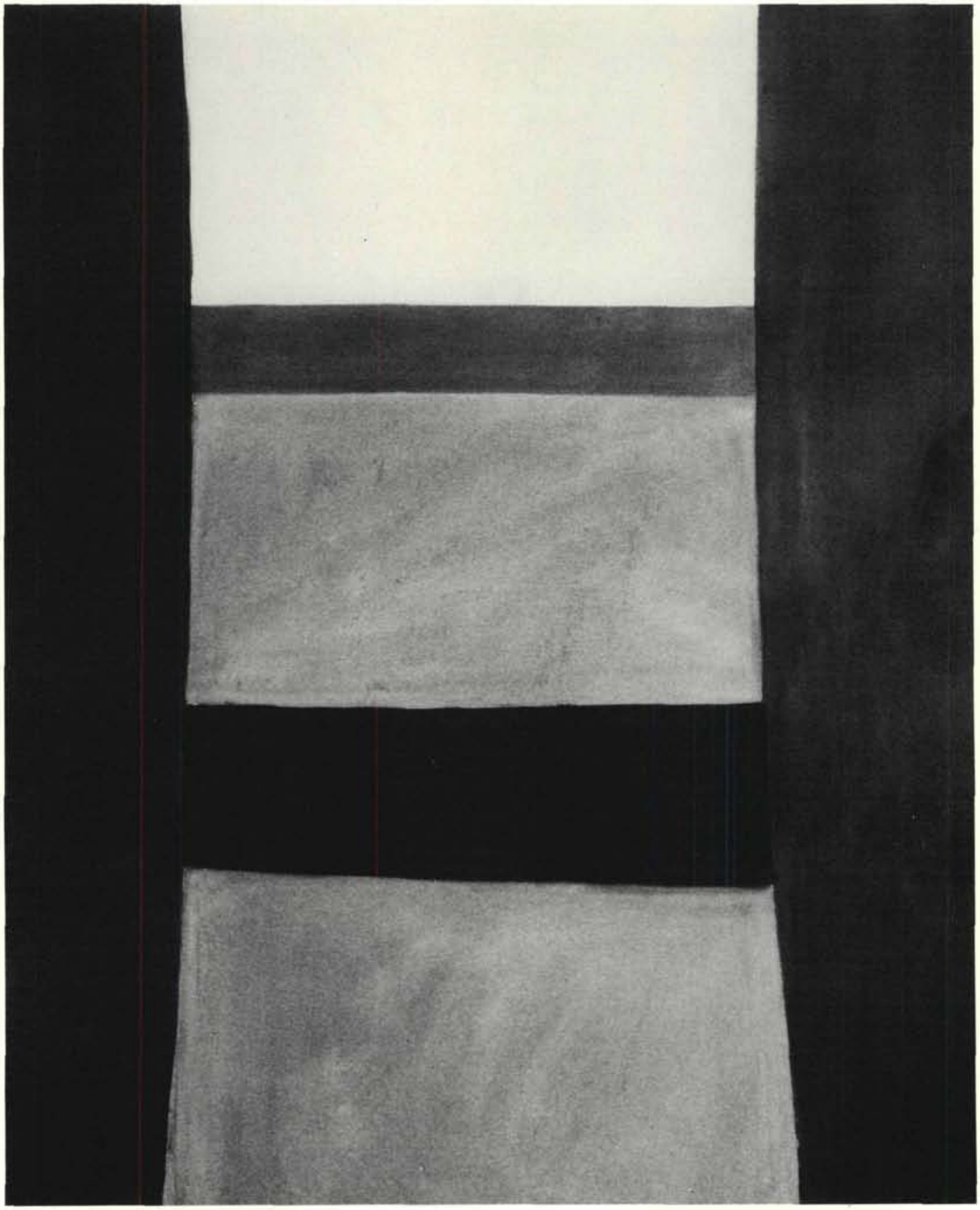
Paintings, Drawings & Collages,
1920-1964

October 25–November 24

XAVIER FOURCADE INC.

36 East 75th Street New York, New York 10021 212 535-3980

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Columns on Brown, 1965. 6′9½″ x 5′ (207 x 152 cm.)

ANDRE EMMERICH · NEW YORK · ZURICH

JACK BUSH: an exhibition of paintings from 1965 to 1976 on the occasion of the publication of *Jack Bush* at McClelland & Stewart, Toronto and Hudson Hills Press, New York. The exhibition will be open from September 11 through October 6 at the André Emmerich Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022 (Telephone 212 752-0124). An illustrated catalogue is available at $6 postpaid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *September 1984*

Editor *Hilton Kramer*
Publisher *Samuel Lipman*
Managing Editor *Erich Eichman*
Assistant Managing Editor *Eva Szent-Miklosy*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Office Manager *Colleen Babington*
Editorial Intern *Eileen Gillespie*

Contributors to this issue

Bruce Bawer writes regularly for *The New Criterion.* His last article, "A Summoning of Spirits: James Merrill and *Sandover,*" appeared in the June issue.

Cleanth Brooks is Gray Professor of Rhetoric Emeritus at Yale University. He is the author of *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry,* among many other books.

Eric Gibson has written for *The New Criterion* on the art of Mark Tansey and Bill Jensen.

Donald Hall's collection of essays about baseball and other sports, *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons,* will be published by North Point Press early in 1985.

Dan Hofstadter wrote on Paula Modersohn-Becker in the April issue of *The New Criterion.*

Roger Kimball, a free-lance writer, has written for *The Thomist* and *The Bennington Review.*

Mimi Kramer is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion.*

Ewa Kuryluk is the author of *Viennese Apocalypse: A Collection of Essays on Viennese Art and Literature around 1900* and *Salomé, or on Pleasure: The Grotesque in the Work of Aubrey Beardsley.* She is currently a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University.

Samuel Lipman is the music critic for *Commentary.* A new collection of his essays, *The House of Music,* has recently been published by David R. Godine.

Herbert Morris's volume of poems, *Peru,* was published by Harper & Row last year. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker, The Kenyon Review,* and *The Hudson Review.*

Jed Perl, a painter and critic, teaches at the Parsons School of Design.

Robert Richman has written for *Commentary, The Village Voice,* and the *Times Literary Supplement.*

The New Criterion is published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Publication Number ISSN 0734-0222. September 1984, Volume 3, Number 1. Subscription rates: $27 for one year, $50 for two. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

Copyright © 1984 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc.

Distributed in England by Periodicals in Particular, 1 Prince of Wales Passage, 117 Hampstead Road, London, NW1. Editorial/business correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt of an issue must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of its date.
Advertising representative: Catherine Shanley, 521 Fifth Ave., NY 10175. (212) 268-2162; 757-6454.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Louise Bourgeois

New Work
September 1984

ROBERT MILLER
724 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
212·246·1625

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who was Josephine Herbst?

by Hilton Kramer

Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?
—Measure for Measure

There is a passage in an essay by Henry James—it occurs in the obituary article he wrote on "Dumas the Younger" in 1895—which defines very exactly the feeling we are likely to experience when, at a certain age, we see the people we have known and who have meant a good deal to us pass away and become in death something very different from what they were in life, both in their own lives and in ours.

> One of the things that most bring home his time of life to a man of fifty [James wrote] is the increase of the rate at which he loses his friends. Some one dies every week, some one dies every day, and if the rate be high among his coevals it is higher still in the generation that, on awakening to spectatorship, he found in possession of the stage. He begins to feel his own world, the world of his most vivid impressions, gradually become historical. He is present, and closely present, at the process by which legend grows up.

For the past year or so I have had reason to ponder this passage a good deal as I have read—first in manuscript, then in galleys, and finally in its published form—the biography which Elinor Langer has devoted to my old friend Josephine Herbst.[1] When Josie Herbst died in 1969, I wasn't yet, to be sure, a man of fifty. I was almost ten years younger than that. Nevertheless, both her death and its aftermath gave me for the first time and to an extent unequaled by the passing of any other writer or artist I have known precisely the perspective, with all of its attendant nuances, that James spoke of. They gave me, that is, my first experience of seeing "the world of [my] most vivid impressions, gradually become historical." And now, with the publication of Elinor Langer's book these fifteen years later, I have the distinct feeling of finding myself "present, and closely present, at the process by which legend grows up." For if I read the signs correctly, Josie Herbst is about to be readmitted—and with a certain fanfare, too—to the public arena of literature and politics where, before her fall, she had passed so much of her adult life. It will not be primarily as an admired author, however, that she will now be rediscovered. Almost all of her writings have long been out of print, and few of the enthusiasts who are now eagerly preparing to assist in her elevation to stardom can be expected to have read them. This time it will not be as a novelist or journalist or memoirist that Josie Herbst will be welcomed into the company of the elect—not yet, anyway—but as a radical heroine and martyr of the feminist movement. Which, if this should come to pass, would

1 *Josephine Herbst* by Elinor Langer. Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown; 374 pages, $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tell us—as all such acts of canonization do—a good deal more about the strange times in which we are now living than it would about the tormented life and the failed work of the woman herself.

To the world that presides over canonizations of this sort—the world where reputations are made, influence wielded, and significant sums of money dispensed—Josie Herbst had become a ghostly figure in the years that I knew her, the last dozen years of her long life. Although recognized by name in the councils of the literary establishment, she was nonetheless shunned and "forgotten"—a writer who, though she might still be expected at some future date to make a comeback, was pretty much left to make it on her own. Except to a small circle of (mostly younger) friends and admirers and an even smaller circle of survivors from her own generation, she had dropped out of sight. Whether this constituted a withdrawal on her part (which to some degree it was) or an outright rejection by her contemporaries (which in part it also was) is a matter likely to be a subject of debate and speculation now that her life and career are up for reexamination. For all practical purposes, however, she was in the years that I knew her an "unknown" figure. She was ignored, she was unread, and she was very poor—living, as a matter of fact, largely on handouts from her friends, a few of whom had some money but most of whom were, like myself, just getting by on modest salaries and makeshift incomes. More often than not in those days she was reduced to wearing hand-me-down clothes, and she spent much of her time, especially in winter, since her house in Pennsylvania had neither central heating nor indoor plumbing, residing in one borrowed apartment after another. She was not only broke, she was broken—shattered by the vicissitudes of an unhappy life that she was desperately attempting to come to terms with and never quite succeeding.

That she was also in those years a woman of tremendous vitality and spirit, a sparkling talker and articulate storyteller possessed of a vivid personality, an appealing sense of humor, and a genius for making herself interesting and even endearing; a woman, moreover, for whom the glamour and the hardship of the old literary life had never lost their magical spell—all of this only added to the high drama of her situation and the terrible poignancy of her shattered hopes. For make no mistake about it, it was as a failure and as a peculiarly significant failure—as a failed writer and as a failed woman—that some of us knew her in those last years. Call her, if you like, a heroine and a martyr—that, certainly, will be the approach of those now bent on enlisting Josie Herbst in their various causes—but to do so is, among much else, to sentimentalize a tragedy. It was, in any case, as an example of a certain kind of failure that we knew her, and as a failure, oddly enough, that she made her claim upon us.

In the biography that Elinor Langer has now given us—the first to be devoted to Josephine Herbst—no attempt has been made to soften this sense of failure or to shift responsibility for it onto others. Miss Langer understands very well that, whatever else may have been involved, the principal cause of Josie Herbst's undoing was Josie Herbst herself, and she doesn't flinch from disclosing a good deal of ugly detail—much of which will be a revelation even to those few who think they know the subject well—in the course of telling her absorbing story. There are villains in the book, and some surprising ones, too, and no shortage of mean-spirited and even horrific actions, all meticulously recounted. But it is one of the virtues of this book that its author never attempts to disguise or to mitigate the role played by Josie herself in some of the most terrible episodes of her life. Miss Langer is an unsparing writer, and a very gifted one, too, and it is a mark of her candor that the tale that is told in *Josephine Herbst* is almost unrelievedly grim. She not only has a keen grasp of the wretchedness that dominated so much of Josie Herbst's life, but she has had the skill to so arrange the narrative that many of the most horrifying events are told in Josie Herbst's own words—though not,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of course, from her point of view alone. Miss Langer maintains her own authorial voice throughout, and while her sympathy for Josie Herbst is openly stated and deeply felt, in biographical matters it does not blind her —except in one outstanding regard—to her subject's more egregious failings.

On only one issue—but one that is absolutely central to the life of Josephine Herbst —can Miss Langer be said to have failed, and failed utterly, to take hold of her subject with the requisite tough-mindedness and deal frankly with its implications. That issue is politics, about which Miss Langer appears to share so many of the illusions that disfigured Josie Herbst's life and work that she can no more bring herself to deal with them than Josie herself could. As a result, Miss Langer is obliged to lapse into a kind of silence or else take refuge in a kind of innocence or insouciance about the one phenomenon which, more than any other, caused the woman she is writing about to become a casualty of her time. That phenomenon, of course, is Stalinism in all of its many manifestations, political and cultural. About the role of Stalinism, then, both in Josie Herbst's life and in Elinor Langer's book, there is much to be said, and I shall address that issue here in its appropriate place. Astonishingly, Miss Langer leaves the subject untouched. Yet the life of Josephine Herbst cannot really be understood in isolation from the Stalinist ethos that shaped so crucial a part of it.

In writing about Elinor Langer's *Josephine Herbst,* however, I cannot pretend to speak as a disinterested observer. I must declare my interest, which, both in relation to Josie Herbst and in regard to Miss Langer's book, has been a very close and somewhat paradoxical one. It is not only that I knew Josie Herbst and spent a great many hours in conversation with her over a period of years, or even that I felt—despite our many differences—a deep affection for her. There is more to it than that. Shortly before her death, Josie Herbst made an arrangement with Yale University for the sale of her papers, and as a result an extensive Josephine Herbst archive was established at Yale's Beinecke Library. At the time she made this arrangement, Josie asked me to serve as the executor of her estate in the event of her death. This I agreed to do. When she died, I therefore found myself with the sole responsibility for granting access to her papers. This meant, among other things, that no serious biography of Josephine Herbst could be written without my cooperation. Perhaps I should add that restrictions had to be placed on the papers in the interest of protecting the privacy of many living persons. All her life Josie had been a tireless correspondent. Often, especially in her later years, she made copies of her letters. In some cases her letters were later returned to her en bloc. Her correspondence with certain writers she had known—Katherine Anne Porter, for example—was copious. Friends frequently confided their innermost secrets to her; perhaps at times they even invented some for her benefit. It was not unusual for casual acquaintances, people she hardly knew but upon whom she had made an emphatic impression, to bare their souls when writing to her—especially in response to her own letters, which were often marvelous. In addition to the letters there are also notebooks. Some of these, too, deal with intimate affairs, her own and others'. Josie appears to have kept everything. The papers are voluminous. Obviously some sort of limit had to be placed on access to them, and I made certain that this would be done. I have never myself read through the entire archive; as far as I know, Miss Langer is the only person to have done so. But in the period immediately following Josie's death I read just enough in these papers to acquire a pretty good notion of what their potential might be for causing pain, embarrassment, or worse to a great many people. I took it as part of my task as executor to ensure that this would not happen.

Exactly why Josie Herbst selected me for this task is not a question to which I can give a definitive answer. I frankly don't know for certain. She had several friends with whom

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she shared political confidences (I now realize) she never shared with me; and there were others she was closer to in other ways. She certainly knew there were many political issues about which we disagreed categorically, and she was well aware, too, that there were many aspects of her life about which she had been less than candid with me. The painful truth is, she lied much and she concealed much. (But this, of course, I did not discover until after her death.) I can only assume that about the things that mattered most to her at that time she trusted my judgment, and that in any case she wanted an executor who would allow the truth to be told about her life when the time came to tell it. I think it was important to her, too, to know that her literary affairs would not fall into the hands of an academic. She had a very low opinion of the way the professors of literature were coming to deal with the writers of her generation. (Carlos Baker's biography of Hemingway, whom she had known well in earlier years, was a particular object of scorn; she could rail about it for hours. And some of the interpretations then being made of the work of her friend Nathanael West prompted similar outbursts.) About all that, anyway, we were agreed; it was a subject we discussed many times. That she was also fond of me I knew, and that no doubt contributed to her decision. Perhaps, being childless, she had come to think of my relation to her as somehow filial. (She was thirty-six years my senior—roughly the same age as my mother. Her first novel, *Nothing Is Sacred,* was published the year I was born.) As far as I know, moreover, she never spoke ill of me. This, alas, was unusual with Josie. She had a volatile temper, and was not always in control of it. She also had a nasty habit of saying—and writing—terrible things about her friends, not only those she had for some reason broken with but even some who remained close and who were important to her survival. Some of this was mere gossip and banter, but some of it was designed to cause pain and it did. Whatever the reason, I appear to have been among those exempted from this disagreeable practice. We never quarreled.

Very soon after her death I faced the first test of the trust she had placed in me. Obliged to go through the things she had left in the little stone house in Bucks County that had been her home since the Twenties—but which she had never owned—I discovered, buried under a pile of old clothes at the bottom of an ancient steamer trunk in the attic, a parcel of papers neatly wrapped in brown paper. On the outside was written, unmistakably in Josie's own hand, the word "Destroy." It frankly never occurred to me for a moment that I should follow this injunction, or indeed was meant to. Josie had lived in that house for forty years with a wood-burning stove in the living room, and she had ample opportunity to consign to its flames whatever papers she wished to destroy. I assumed—and Miss Langer's biography seems to confirm—that Josie could not bring herself either to destroy or to take responsibility for preserving what this parcel contained. What it contained, as it turned out, were the letters, which had been returned to her, that chronicle one of the key episodes of her life. This was the love affair with another woman, Marion Greenwood, that led directly to the breakup of Josie's marriage to John Herrmann—an event that had caused her the deepest unhappiness of her life, and from which in fact she never recovered.

These letters proved to be important in another respect. For they did much, though far from everything, to explain one of the mysteries of Josie's later years: why it was that, despite years of work on what she well understood was the best writing she had ever done in her life and the strong and repeated encouragement of her friends—Saul Bellow and Alfred Kazin, among them—Josie could never bring her own volume of memoirs to completion. She had a publisher ready to produce the book, and everyone who read the completed portions of it expected it to be a masterpiece—her first, by the way. Yet it was never finished, and I now realize that there was never any possibility of its being finished. For Josie could never deal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with either the sexual or the political events that had destroyed her life, and neither could she deny them. But on this matter, too, I shall have more to say here in the appropriate place. Like so much else in Josie Herbst's life, it brings us back to the ugly issue of Stalinism, which came to play an important role in her marriage, in its breakup, and in the life she lived thereafter.[2]

She was born in Sioux City, Iowa, on March 5, 1892. (The year is worth noting, for beginning in the Twenties Josie gave 1897 as the date of her birth.) Her parents were poor, respectable, small-town people who had migrated to Iowa from their native Pennsylvania with two baby daughters. Josie's father, who had a farm implement business that failed, was amiable but unambitious. Her mother, whom Josie adored, was a more spirited character, interested in reading and an avid storyteller herself, and never quite reconciled to life in the Iowa provinces. It was from the stories that she told of her family and its travails that Josie drew much of the material for her fiction.

Josie was the first of the Herbst daughters to be born in Iowa. Her younger sister Helen followed three years later, and they both grew up sharing their mother's contempt for Iowa and its benighted ways. Like a good many American writers of her generation who came out of the Middle West, Josie had determined from an early age to leave it. But this was not a mission easily accomplished. Lacking money, she was in and out of college for eight years, working at one small-town job or another to pay for her education, and desperately lonely and unhappy the whole time. She first attended Morningside College while living at home, then the University of Iowa and the University of Washington until, at the age of twenty-five, she made it to Berkeley, where she graduated from the University of California in 1918.

She seems always to have wanted to be a writer, and it was at Berkeley that she was first encouraged in that ambition by one of her professors. It was there, too, that for the first time she found a radical milieu hospitable to her own rebellious spirit. "I always knew," Josie wrote her mother at this time, "that somewhere in the world were people who could talk about the things I wanted to talk about and do the things I wanted to do and in some measure at least I have found them."

> Nothing Josie did with her friends in San Francisco [writes Miss Langer] seems very remarkable now. They listened to speeches and climbed Mount Tamalpais and shared festive bohemian dinners . . . or just sat around . . . arguing about the war and capitalism and wondering what was going to happen next.

All the same, it marked the real beginning—a late, hard-won beginning—of Josie's adult life, and not only because of what it contributed to her political or literary outlook. "For the first time in her life," writes Miss Langer, "she was comfortable with men."

Despite this initiation into radical bohemia, however, Josie had still never had a real love affair when she arrived in New York in the fall of 1919, and it was never her fate to be lucky in love. When she did have her first affair, she was twenty-eight years old, and it ended badly. Her lover was Maxwell Anderson, who was later to achieve renown as a playwright but who was then an editorial writer for the *Globe,* a New York newspaper. The problem was, he was married. It was through his wife, in fact, that Josie had met him soon after arriving in New York. For him the affair was a diversion and he soon ended it, but for Josie it was love. When, after the breakup, she discovered she was pregnant, she wanted to have the baby, but Anderson opposed it and persuaded her to have an abortion. It was a decision she bitterly regretted.

2 The three published sections of the memoirs are: "The Starched Blue Sky of Spain" (*The Noble Savage,* Number 1, 1960), "A Year of Disgrace" (*The Noble Savage,* Number 3, 1961), and "Yesterday's Road" (*New American Review,* Number 3, 1968).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The novel that Josie afterwards wrote about this experience—it was never published, or indeed publishable—was pretty grim, a tale in the Dreiserian mode, but the real life story had an epilogue that even Dreiser might have hesitated to write. As she was recovering from the abortion, Josie was suddenly bombarded with appeals from her beloved younger sister. Like Josie, Helen had been determined to get out of Sioux City, but she hadn't yet made it. She had married her Sioux City boyfriend, who shared her worldly ambitions—he was later to have a distinguished career as a newspaper editor—and they had been desperately saving money to make their getaway. But now she found she was pregnant and she didn't want to have the baby. It would ruin their lives, she thought. Josie thought so, too, and so without ever disclosing to her sister (or to almost anyone else) the nature of the ordeal she had just been through herself, she encouraged Helen to have an abortion. Helen did, and she died as a result.

Overcome by guilt and remorse, Josie suffered something of a breakdown in the aftermath of her sister's death, and while she eventually pulled herself together it was an event that had a permanent—and damaging—effect on her life. Miss Langer is right, I think, in observing that "when [Josie] lost Helen she lost part of herself and the most important relationships of the rest of her life were attempts in one way or another to bring her sister back." But there is more to it than that. For what this whole episode revealed was a fundamental fissure in Josie Herbst's character—a refusal of honesty and responsibility that turned out to be one of the deepest things about her. This was the hardest thing for Josie's friends to come to terms with after her death. It was certainly the hardest for me, especially since her whole personal style—both in private conversation and in her extraordinary letters—gave the impression of achieving a degree of candor and self-revelation that was both unusual and exemplary. The mask—or what Miss Langer calls the "performance"—was so appealing that many of her friends have to this day refused to abandon their belief in it, preferring the fiction to the reality. And so great is their need to believe in that mask—for it is now theirs as well—that I doubt if even the revelations of Miss Langer's biography will do much to modify it.

Despite the ordeals that Josie suffered in New York in the early Twenties, it was there that her literary career began in earnest, and there too that she became an active participant in the literary-radical-bohemian world which remained her spiritual home for the rest of her life. In 1920 she landed a job with H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan—not, by the way, on the *Smart Set,* but working on some of the "sleazier publications," as Miss Langer correctly calls them, which they were also producing at that time. This led to the publication of her fiction in the *Smart Set,* and won her Mencken's support when she later tried to find a publisher for her novel about the Anderson affair. Her friends in this period included Genevieve Taggard, Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman, Floyd Dell, Jessica Smith, Alex Gumberg, Max Eastman, and Albert Rhys Williams, all of whom were already ardent and active supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution. When she went to Europe in the spring of 1922, having saved enough money for the trip, she spent the summer traveling with Eastman and Williams, who then went on to Moscow while Josie herself settled in Berlin. There she remained for the better part of two years, working on the novel that she hadn't quite finished when she went off to Paris and met John Herrmann—"a young and beautiful boy," as she described him to Genevieve Taggard—with whom she instantly fell in love.

Herrmann was twenty-three; Josie was thirty-two, but passing for twenty-seven. He was extremely good-looking; she had never been beautiful. Like herself, he had just spent two years in Germany—in his case, Munich, where he had gone to study art history but where he had devoted himself instead to working on a novel. They were both Midwesterners. He was from Lansing, Michi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gan, the son of a prosperous, straight-laced businessman with whom he could not get along and not quite get along without. John was weak, and Josie was strong. He was also already an alcoholic. On the day she was introduced to him at the Café du Dome in Montparnasse, he was suffering from a severe hangover. "Everything that was true when they parted," Miss Langer writes, "was true when they met. Josie was ambitious and John was not ambitious, he preferred the company of the cafés and she preferred the solitude of the typewriter, he had confidence in his charm but not in his book and she had confidence in her book but not in her charm. But what became difficult oppositions when things were dissolving between them were magnetizing complements at the time they began."

In France their whirlwind romance had been an idyll of sorts, but when they returned to the United States, which they promptly did, there was trouble, of course. John was still dependent on his despised parents. He was also an incorrigible womanizer—he seems never to have been faithful to Josie for very long. What Josie wanted most was for them to live in rural Connecticut, near writer-friends of hers, where they would live simply and work on their books. She was nothing if not determined to have her way. The only obstacle was money, and she solved that problem by blackmailing Maxwell Anderson, whose love letters she had kept. Miss Langer doesn't use that ugly word, but that is what it came to—and John knew all about it. It was not, perhaps, the soundest basis for a serene relationship.

Off they went, then, to a small farmhouse in New Preston, Connecticut, in the fall of 1925. Josie afterwards called this period "The Hour of Counterfeit Bliss," and it was undoubtedly the happiest time in her life. But it was soon over. John's mother got wind of the fact that her son was living in sin, and she hired a private detective to investigate. As a result, since John could not resist the pressures of his family and there was always the hope of getting some money out of them, he was forced into marrying Josie. This was not what they had planned on doing. Josie always spoke of it, with varying degrees of humor, resentment, or sarcasm, as her "shotgun marriage"—though in truth, she wanted very much to be married to John Herrmann. And the hope of getting some money out of it was not unfounded—though, like everything else, this, too, didn't turn out as they had hoped. John's parents were persuaded to put up twenty-five hundred dollars for the old stone house in Bucks County that Josie wanted to buy—she had found it, as Miss Langer writes, in "the eastern Pennsylvania countryside she had been hearing about from her mother all her life"—but John's father kept the deed in his own name. That house was to be the only home Josie had for the rest of her life, but it was never her house, and she had to fight hard to remain in it after the marriage had dissolved.

Still, they were together and they were living the literary life they wanted. In 1927, just before they moved to Pennsylvania, John's novel, *What Happens,* was published by Robert McAlmon in Paris, and it was refused entry into the United States on grounds of obscenity. (Morris Ernst took the case, and lost.) Josie's first published novel, *Nothing Is Sacred,* followed in 1928. Hemingway and Ring Lardner provided the blurbs, and Ford Madox Ford and Katherine Anne Porter reviewed it favorably. Josie and John were both publishing in the magazines, too, though she more than he, and among the visitors they welcomed to Pennsylvania were Malcolm Cowley and Kenneth Burke. They spent some time with Hemingway in Key West.

By that time, however, they were being drawn into the political movement that came to play a dominant role in their lives. In 1930, at the suggestion of Mike Gold, they went to Russia to attend the International Congress of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov. Miss Langer describes this trip as "More of a lark than a pilgrimage," but "lark" doesn't strike one as quite the *mot juste* for it. In any case, John emerged from the experience a complete convert to Com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

munism and a dedicated supporter of the Soviet Union. Josie, though she expressed private doubts (as she always would), was also enthusiastic. "Perhaps as early as 1931 he joined the Communist Party," writes Miss Langer. "It was something that Josie never did."

She was still primarily a writer; John was now less interested in literature than in political action. Josie's response to the political atmosphere was to re-interpret the story of her family's history in Marxist terms, and this is what she did in the trilogy of novels that was her main work of the Thirties—*Pity Is Not Enough* (1933), *The Executioner Waits* (1934), and *Rope of Gold* (1939). John's response, in the beginning at least, was to become a public speaker for Communist Party causes, but before long he was drawn into the Communist underground where, if the word of his widow Ruth Herrmann is to be believed, he achieved the historic distinction of being the man who introduced Whittaker Chambers to Alger Hiss.

Before that fateful drama was enacted, however, another, more personal crisis had intervened to shatter what remained of their disintegrating marriage. Josie met Marion Greenwood. In the summer of 1932 Josie was at the Yaddo colony in Saratoga Springs by herself. John had taken her there, and then gone on to Michigan for the summer. Marion Greenwood, a young painter, very talented and very beautiful, arrived at the colony soon after Josie, and Josie fell madly in love with her. Josie had had romantic attachments to other women, but nothing like this. The affair that ensued quite swept her off her feet, and she was tenacious about keeping it going. And as it progressed she still harbored the illusion that she could keep her marriage going too. Toward this end she contrived to bring John into the affair after her term at Yaddo was over. The three of them went off to Mexico together where Josie and John took turns, as it were, as Marion's lovers. It couldn't last, and it didn't. As sexually susceptible and as weak-willed as John was, he was clearly humiliated by the whole sordid experience, and he took off. In a panic, Josie chose her husband over her lover. She still couldn't believe her marriage was coming to an end—that, in fact, it was over. She clung to John as long as she could, but it was soon over, anyway.

Politically, the issue that most excited them in this period was the effort of the Communist Party to organize the farmers—to organize them, it is worth remembering, against the policies of the New Deal. John was much involved in this effort, and Josie wrote about it for the *New Masses*. "For Josie," Miss Langer writes, "it was not only her moment of greatest identification with the farmers but of consonance with the Communist Party 'line.'" For John, it proved to be his ticket to the Communist underground. In 1934 he was summoned to Washington by Hal Ware, who presided over the special underground operation which Chambers, among others, was already serving. When Josie followed John to Washington, still hoping for a reconciliation, she lived in his apartment, and was thus in a position to know something—if not everything—about the secret Party work that John was engaged in. She knew Hal Ware, she knew Whittaker Chambers, and she knew at least enough about what they were doing to disapprove of it and ridicule it. Which was not, to say the least, the way to John's heart at that moment, but she did it anyway—and not because she disagreed with Party policy, but ostensibly because she considered the work ineffective (or so Miss Langer suggests). I think the real reason she disapproved was that she feared that she was losing John to his new involvement in the Party underground—which she was, and in more than one sense. For the woman John married after he finally broke with Josie and with whom he was already involved was his confidante in Party activities. (It was she, forty years later, who told Elinor Langer that John had introduced Chambers to Hiss over a lunch in Washington in 1934.) One of the things that Josie knew, too—it may have been the only important thing she ever knew about the whole operation—was that Alger Hiss was somehow involved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was this knowledge that placed Josie, at the time of the Hiss case, in a position to change the course of history by revealing what she knew, but she never did. Out of her loyalty to the Left and out of her loyalty to John—with the passage of time, these became virtually identical in her mind—she not only didn't speak up, but she offered her services to the Hiss defense lawyers. (She also lied a good deal to the FBI, and sent word to John, who had fled to Mexico, about what she had said.) Being a true believer in the ideals of the Left, she proved to be something of an embarrassment to Hiss's lawyers, however. She urged them to encourage Hiss to speak up in court by defending his political beliefs, which she knew to be Communist. But this, of course, would have identified Hiss as a Communist, and it was the whole point of the Hiss defense to deny that he had ever been one.[3] Yet she went along with that, too, and kept her silence—and at considerable personal cost to herself, for Chambers had already given her name, as well as John's, to the FBI, and she was frequently interrogated on the matter. This was no doubt one of the things that led to the denial of a passport when she applied for one in the Fifties.

There is much more to Josie Herbst's story, of course—the trips to Cuba, Germany, and Spain in the Thirties; the job she took with the Government in Washington after the United States entered the Second World War, and the reason she was fired from it; the breakup of her long friendship with Katherine Anne Porter, and the reasons for that; and the affair with the poet Jean Garrigue that was even more disastrous and far more protracted than the affair with Marion Greenwood—and Miss Langer has told it all very vividly. Yet there is a sense in which it can truly be said that Josie Herbst's life came to an end when John Herrmann walked out of it for the last time, and that what remained in all her later years was a half-life of shadows and chimeras, of concealments and denials and lost hopes, which, though she no longer had the power, for the most part, to turn them into effective literary fictions, she became more and more adept at transforming into a fictional personality for herself, the dazzling mask that enchanted so many of her friends. Only once, in my own acquaintance with Josie, was I ever given a glimpse of the ravaged spirit that the mask so effectively concealed. I had been spending the weekend at the house in Pennsylvania, ostensibly to talk over the manuscript of the memoirs on which she was working. It was clear to me that she was stymied—I thought, of course, temporarily—and she talked about some of the reasons why she was having so much trouble writing this book. Lack of money, lack of time, problems with the house, distractions of every kind—as the litany continued, I could see that even she wasn't convinced by what she was saying, though her life was anything but comfortable or serene. Just before I left—we were standing in the doorway, about to walk down to the car—I said to her: "Josie, you must finish it. Why can't you finish it?" To my astonishment, she cried out: "It's *John,* I can't deal with John!" And she was so overcome with fits of sobbing that it took some time, and some drinks, before she could pull herself together. All I knew about John then was that he had left her for another woman. I knew nothing about his involvement with Hiss and Chambers and Hal Ware—or Josie's, for that matter. I knew nothing about Marion Greenwood. But from that moment on I was never as confident as I had been that the memoirs would ever be finished.

What few of Josie's friends in her later years understood, I think—and it may be that Miss Langer doesn't quite grasp it, either, though she provides ample evidence for it—is the degree to which Josie's experience as a woman, especially the experiences that she initiated, together with the passions and dishonesties that marked her political life, and the effort involved in concealing, for so much of the time, the true nature of

3 Allen Weinstein's *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) was the first work to provide a detailed account of Josie's role in the case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both, had the effect of brutalizing her personality. There was a streak of sheer ruthlessness and brute callousness in her personality that is as observable in her personal relations, especially in her relations with her lovers, as it is in her politics, and it would be a mistake to think that politics was responsible for what finally must be regarded as a defect of character. Politics does not account for her role in Helen's death, for the blackmailing of Maxwell Anderson, or for the way she corrupted—there is no other word for it—her own beloved husband in the Marion Greenwood affair. All her life she was drawn to weak, vulnerable, romantic men and women, whose lives she hoped to overwhelm and control, and she could never quite understand why it was that in the end they always fled.

Yet, if politics does not explain Josie Herbst's character, it nonetheless contributed much to the brutalization I speak of. Which brings us to the question of Stalinism, and its role in Josie's life. It is in the nature of Stalinism for its adherents to make a certain kind of lying—and not only to others, but first of all to themselves—a fundamental part of their lives. It is always a mistake to assume that Stalinists do not know the truth about the political reality they espouse. If they don't know the truth (or all of it) one day, they know it the next, and it makes absolutely no difference to them politically. For their loyalty is to something other than the truth. And no historical enormity is so great, no personal humiliation or betrayal so extreme, no crime so heinous, that it cannot be assimilated into the "ideals" that govern the true Stalinist mind, which is impervious alike to documentary evidence and moral discrimination.

Was Josie Herbst a true Stalinist? Despite all the reservations and criticisms she voiced in private and despite her many disagreements with the Communist Party and its policies, I think it must be said that for the most part she was. That wasn't all she was, of course, but in a large part of her mind for an important part of her life she was, all the same. The slaughter of the peasants in Stalin's collectivization campaign, the Moscow trials, the Great Terror and the Hitler-Stalin pact, not to mention a great many later developments in the post-World War II period—however much she may have suffered over them, she nonetheless swallowed them. There was a lot she choked on, but in the end she swallowed it all. Which is why she remained "loyal" in the Hiss case, and in many lesser causes as well. Whatever she disapproved or regretted or even disavowed—Miss Langer cites many instances, and I could describe others—was always done privately, and never where it would make any difference, and always subsumed under the comforting and exonerating rubric of "What went wrong?" There was never an acknowledgement—even privately, as far as I know—that it was the whole political outlook that was wrong. There was no conception of how evil it all was.

It was the process of brutalization that resulted from all this, I believe, that first confused and then immobilized her as a writer once the audience ready to embrace radical certainties evaporated from the literary scene in the Forties. When she started to write again in the Fifties, it was in a very different mode—a mode of Proustian reminiscence in which the old certainties were dissolved in an evocation of cherished experience. In the memoirs even the most painful memories of the past are, so to speak, aesthetized in a style that Josie would have been incapable of commanding in the heyday of her radical involvement and personal rebellion. Upon this whole later phase of her literary work there is to be found, I believe, the influence of Jean Garrigue—the poet she met (again at Yaddo) in the winter of 1949-50, and with whom she promptly fell in love—and the influence of Jean Garrigue's literary tastes. Jean Garrigue had no interest in politics, no interest in social issues, no interest in anything having to do with the radical movement that had shaped Josie's adult life. She was a romantic aesthete, a lyrical poet of considerable delicacy and nuance whose interests were mainly confined to artistic and amatory experience. In all per-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sonal matters she was completely irresponsible, and she and Josie managed to cause each other a great deal of pain over the long course of their stormy attachment, but in literary matters Jean's influence proved, I think, to be decisive in the way Josie now conceived of writing her reminiscences. It is precisely their "aesthetic" character that sets them apart from all her earlier writing.

Yet there were some experiences that resisted this new mode of Proustian reminiscence, and they turned out to be the most crucial. The central emotional crisis of Josie Herbst's life was so intimately connected with its central political loyalty that there was no way of separating them. In the end, the late-blooming aesthetic writer of the memoirs lost out to the vanquished, silent survivor of the Thirties.

Josie Herbst's death in January 1969 came at a moment when events in the world of both politics and culture were swiftly bringing in their wake a significant change in attitude toward the radical movement of the Thirties. The emergence of the New Left in response to the Vietnam war and the accompanying eruption of a vigorous anti-government, anti-middle-class counterculture had the effect of casting even the most extreme Stalinist positions of Thirties radicalism in a new and more favorable light. Actions and beliefs which had long been regarded as morally repugnant because of their abject subservience to the interests of the Soviet Union and which, as we know, in some notable cases had led to spying and espionage, began to enjoy the benefit of a sweeping revisionism. Liberals who had once known better, or seemed to, now either tempered or abandoned their opposition to radical militancy, as liberals generally do when the tide is running in favor of the radical position. Even in the ranks of the most stalwart anti-Stalinist intellectuals there were some notable defections—such as Dwight Macdonald's and Philip Rahv's—to this revival of the radical dream. All of this made it possible for Stalinists who had survived the debacle of the Thirties and the investigations of the Fifties to come forward once again to bask in the rosy glow of yet another (promised) red dawn. As the call to revolution beckoned the young and the revivified romance of the Left renewed the celebrity of aging radicals, a kind of sainthood began to be conferred upon almost anyone who had once been identified with Stalinist causes and had not at any time publically repudiated them.

Josie Herbst died just a little too soon to reap the full benefit of this historic reversal in her lifetime. By the late Sixties, when the new revisionism was beginning to acquire some real momentum and influence, she was too ill, too weak, too demoralized, and too scattered in her efforts to do much more than act as an interested but ineffectual witness to its development. That she welcomed it there can be no doubt. But at the time she was extremely discreet, if not actually devious, in what she said about it and to whom. To friends like myself, whom she knew to be unsympathetic to the radical cause, she often voiced skeptical and even critical views of its conduct. Without exactly denying her loyalty to the radical position—something she would never bring herself to do—she could nonetheless be quite vehement in her criticism of the actions and attitudes it was then engendering. Yet in speaking or writing to dedicated radicals or those she hoped to convert to the radical cause, she was even more vehement and a lot less guarded in her expressions of support. It is possible, of course, that this zigzag course reflected a genuinely divided attitude on her part, but I doubt if that was really the case. Elinor Langer's biography leaves little room for doubt in this matter.

Josie had been dead a very short time when I began receiving inquiries about the Yale archive. Given the political temper of the time, I naturally expected that any new interest in Josie would focus on whatever reputation she had as a radical and, more specifically, on her contribution to the so-called "proletarian" novel in the Thirties. But at the outset this was not usually the case. Most of the inquiries came from grad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uate students who had little or no acquaintance with the novels Josie had published between 1928 and 1947. Often these students did not even know what she had written. Some may have read an installment or two of the published memoirs. Others, to my astonishment, had read nothing by her. They had simply been given her name as a possible subject for research by faculty advisors who themselves knew little more about her than that she had once been associated with some famous writers—Hemingway, Dos Passos, et al.—in the Twenties and Thirties. Unembarrassed by their ignorance, most of these students were frankly fishing for "original" documents—letters, manuscripts, etc.—that might be turned into thesis material, and they weren't going to do any unnecessary reading until they knew what they had. They seemed to have no larger literary or intellectual interests, or indeed to have read anything that had not been assigned to them in a course. As kindly as I could, I told them that they would first have to read Josie's published work, which included short stories, essays, and a good deal of journalism in addition to the books, and then come back with more specific requests. The majority of them were never heard from again. It was all a ghastly confirmation of Josie's worst fears about the fate of literature in the academy.

Of the people who contacted me about Josie Herbst in the years immediately following her death, the most serious were the young women—there were never more than a few of them—who had come to their interest in her through an involvement in and partial disenchantment with the radical movement of the Sixties, an experience that had somehow led to a rediscovery of her novels. It was very much as a woman and as a radical that Josie interested them. This was the first indication I was given that Josie's posthumous reputation, if she was to have one, would owe something—I had no idea then how much—to the feminist movement, and specifically to that branch of it in which the residue of Sixties radicalism was quickly finding a home. (For what it is worth, the unserious applicants were all men.) Obviously these young women had been moved—in a way, it must be said, that I had never been—by the portrayal of female experience in the novels and by the sensibility of the female radical who had written them. This response inevitably prompted an interest in Josie herself, for virtually all of her fiction is transparently autobiographical in one degree or another. It didn't take long, moreover, to discover that Josie had herself been a far more compelling character than any she created in her fiction, and this, in turn, led to expressions of interest in writing her biography.

This, more or less, is how Elinor Langer came to write the biography that has now been published nearly a dozen years after she first contacted me, and how I came to play a role of sorts in its preparation. Miss Langer gives an account of how she came to the subject in the very first chapter of the book:

> In 1973, when I first heard of Josephine Herbst, I was living by myself in a small town in Vermont and teaching at a small college . . . yet what I appeared to be doing and what I was doing were two different things because, like so many people I knew then, I was in retreat from the radical movement of the 1960s, and in reality I was spending most of my time mulling over what had happened to the movement, and to myself, and why . . . . [T]o the extent that it was possible in my immediate circumstances I included in my brooding and my browsing as much of the literature of the 1930s as I was able to find—something I had always done, more or less, because the 1930s had felt like family history to me even before the "New Left" was born, but which I now pursued with a greater urgency than ever before. On a visit to Chicago, in a secondhand bookstore, on a shelf labeled "Marxism," I found a collection of essays by participants in the events of the 1930s called *As We Saw the Thirties,* and I bought it as a matter of course. The essay on literature had been written by Granville Hicks, and in it . . . was a small, inviting reference to a trilogy by Josephine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Herbst. Not much . . . but it was enough to send me to the university library the following morning and home with the novels [*Pity Is Not Enough, The Executioner Waits,* and *Rope of Gold*] that very day.
>
> My notes from my first reading of the trilogy are a cross between a sigh of relief and a shout of joy: as if I were a traveler who had somehow gotten detached from my party, and Josephine Herbst were the rescuer sent out to bring me home . . . . The decades between when the trilogy was written and when I was reading it simply fell away from me as I held it in my hands and I felt as if a conversation brusquely terminated with the turn of the 1970s had suddenly been renewed . . . . Of my literary reactions I was far less certain.

Whatever her disappointments with the radical movement of the Sixties may have been, Miss Langer emerged from the experience with a good many of her radical pieties intact, and it was clearly in the interest of vindicating them, as well as of attempting to gain a greater understanding of them, that she was drawn to the subject of Josephine Herbst in the first place. In this respect, as in others, her book is very much a product of the cultural ethos of the Seventies. For one of the least examined aspects of the political and cultural history of the Seventies may be found in the widespread effort that began to be made in that decade to justify the spirit of the radical movement of the Sixties, its failures no less than its successes, by rewriting the history of the Thirties. In attributing all manner of innocence and idealism to Thirties radicalism, even in its most blatantly Stalinist manifestations, and by minimizing, if not actually obliterating, all trace of its evil consequences, this revisionist historiography succeeded in exonerating Sixties radicalism, too, of its worst elements. This impulse certainly plays a large role in the book that Elinor Langer has spent a decade writing, and there can be no doubt that her book belongs to this literature of exoneration.

That it has also turned out to be something more than that is a tribute to Miss Langer's honesty about and understanding of Josie Herbst's character and the nature of her personal tragedy. A radical feminist herself, at least when she began to work on this book, Miss Langer had clearly intended to cast Josie in the role of a radical feminist heroine, but it couldn't be done. All the evidence—mostly, of course, Josie's own evidence—defeated the idea, and Miss Langer found herself obliged to portray a very different figure. This will not prevent others from drafting Josie Herbst's life into the service of feminist causes, now that the life itself has been so meticulously documented. Ideology, when sufficiently motivated, has a way of overlooking obstructive truths. But Miss Langer, anyway, has escaped most, if not quite all, of the temptations to give ideology priority over truth in this matter.

The same, alas, cannot be said about Miss Langer's handling, or mishandling, of the role of Stalinism in Josie Herbst's life and work. In this matter *Josephine Herbst* does indeed belong to the literature of exoneration. To the whole question of Stalinism and its place in Josie's life Miss Langer devotes exactly one footnote and little more. The footnote (on page 199) reads as follows:

> I have frequently been asked during the course of this work whether or not Josie was a "Stalinist" and there are those who believe, primarily on the basis of her connection with the Communist Party during this period, that she was. If her relationship to the American Communist Party and in turn its relationship to the Soviet Union automatically makes her a Stalinist, so be it, but for her long record of independent thought and action—albeit in association with the Communist Party—for my part I find "Stalinism" not only a meaningless, but, indeed, a misleading description.

One could write a lengthy dissertation on the implications of this footnote, and it would begin with an examination of exactly what is meant by its reference to Josie's "long record of independent thought and action—albeit in association with the Communist Party." *Albeit,* indeed. As if the Communist Party had ever, in Josie Herbst's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lifetime, accorded a place for independent thought and action in its programs or policies or in the use it made of writers like Josie! There were, as I have noted, many instances in which Josie criticized the Party and opposed its course of action. But when she was overruled and told, in effect, to shut up, she shut up and she stayed shut up, however much she may have suffered in the process. One wonders if Miss Langer really understands what the word "independent" means in this context.

The sad truth is that Miss Langer cannot deal with the issue of Stalinism and the history that lies behind it. Even on the question of Alger Hiss's guilt, though the evidence—especially Ruth Herrmann's revelation of John Herrmann's role in introducing Hiss to Chambers in 1934—has obliged her to agree that Hiss was indeed lying and that he *was* working for the Communist underground, just as Chambers claimed, she still cannot quite face the basic truth of the matter. Hiss even lied to *her* about John Herrmann, as she candidly reports in her book, and yet she goes on to write about the case as follows:

> The Hiss case is one of the greatest miasmas of American politics . . . . There are no arguments which have not been shaken, there is no evidence which has not been obfuscated, there have been no sentences either uttered or written that have not been parsed into nonsense.

Now this is simply not true. Despite massive and protracted legal attempts to have Hiss's conviction for perjury reversed, the verdict has stuck because the evidence could not—despite Hiss's best efforts—be obfuscated. It has withstood every challenge. To write about the Hiss case in this manner is not an attempt to deal with the historical truth—never mind the moral truth—but an attempt to escape it.

And this, finally, is what Elinor Langer attempts to do with the whole question of Stalinism, both in Josie Herbst's life and in itself—escape it. To have faced it, I suppose, would have meant facing something in her own radical past that she has not yet come to terms with. And so, in yet another generation of disenchanted but nonetheless loyal radicals, the posture of innocence is invoked as a screen against the political realities of our time. It is sad to see this perpetuated in a new generation of writers—and especially in a writer as good as Elinor Langer—but that too, I am afraid, must be counted as an important part of the legacy that Josephine Herbst's silence has bequeathed us.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Learning from Leavis *by Mark Stevens*
The Max Beckmann retrospective *by Dan Hofstadter*
Edgar Wind as man and thinker *by Creighton Gilbert*
"New York 1900" *by William H. Jordy*
The New York concert scene *by Samuel Lipman*
Rewriting the history of modernism *by Hilton Kramer*
New poems *by Donald Justice, Jane Kenyon, Donald Petersen, and Peter Porter*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ivy Litvinov: the commissar's wife

by Samuel Lipman

On its face, the long life of Ivy Litvinov (1889-1977), the little-known wife of a famous man, combined decided improbability with curious irrelevance. So unlikely was what happened to her, and so resolutely minor a figure did she remain, that one can only admire John Carswell, her new and loving English biographer,[1] for attempting to make everything sensible and significant. Why he has essayed the task at all is perhaps a subject for Mr. Carswell's own biographer; our concern here must be with the heroine herself.

She was born Ivy Low, the part-Jewish daughter of a second-rate intellectual jack-of-all-trades who had the good fortune (for his reputation in the eyes of the world and for the esteem of his daughter) to die young. She had, not surprisingly, an unhappy and confined Victorian childhood, which she nevertheless managed to ride into a youthful literary career as a novelist whose most fully imagined subject was herself. Her first novel, *Growing Pains* (1913), was a sentimental codification of the process that prepared her for adult childishness. It was followed by *The Questing Beast* (1914), a torrid (for its time) account of office life and the sexual pitfalls of loneliness. Neither book became a best-seller, but *The Questing Beast,* because of its depiction of scandal, did become a *succès d'estime.*

In 1916, the twenty-seven-year old Miss Low married Maxim Litvinov, a Bolshevik revolutionary detailed to London for semi-clandestine political and financial activity. After the October Revolution of 1917, Litvinov emerged as the official spokesman in England for the new regime in Russia, and soon was in a position to put his fresh diplomatic credentials to the tasks of winning international respectability for the Soviet Union and bringing on the collapse of capitalism.

Soon after, the Litvinovs (now the parents of two children) moved to the Soviet Union, he first and she a bit later. Maxim's activities now centered on the creation of the *Narkomindel,* as the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was known. At first his flair was for administration, with an occasional trip abroad for negotiation thrown in. In 1930, he became Commissar, or foreign minister, and in 1933 he negotiated the recognition of the USSR by the new American administration of Franklin Roosevelt; two years later he negotiated a pact on behalf of Stalin with Pierre Laval and the French government.

As the early 1930s—the locust years, in Churchill's memorable phrase—wore on into the prelude to World War II, Litvinov became the chief international marketer of Stalin's Popular Front against Hitler & Co. His evident sincerity, combined with his rumpled and unpretentious appearance, served to guarantee his master's *bona fides*

1 *The Exile: A Life of Ivy Litvinov,* by John Carswell; Faber & Faber, 216 pages $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

among those formerly hostile to the USSR as well as among those always eager to believe. But once Stalin had decided on a deal with Hitler, the all too Jewish Litvinov had to go, and in the spring of 1939 he went, relieved of his duties (so the official story went) at his own request. In February of 1941—just four months before Germany's invasion of Russia—he was stripped of his membership in the Party Central Committee. But the wily Stalin had one last use for the discarded salesman: in late 1941, five months after Hitler's invasion of Russia, Litvinov was appointed Soviet ambassador to Washington, once more to cultivate his old friend and diplomatic partner FDR. By 1943 he was through, not just in Washington, but as a functioning personage; his death on the last day of 1951 was remarkable only in that it took place in Moscow in his own bed, rather than at the hands of a firing squad.

High-level Soviet wives are semi-pampered phenomena of whom little is known and from whom nothing, save on the rarest of confected occasions, is ever heard. Because Ivy was foreign by birth (and by citizenship), she remained a creature slightly apart from the usual run of childbearing dormice required by the standards of socialist morality. She was, after all, a writer, made so as much by design as by talent; she thought and she wrote in English, bringing to her work, even when she wrote on Soviet themes, a distinctly foreign mentality and literary style.

Her major completed literary project during her Soviet years was a detective novel written (with the aid of hypnotherapy to start the creative juices flowing) in the late 1920s. The story she wrote was set in the petty underworld of Moscow during the period of the New Economic Policy, that cynical Bolshevik use of capitalism and capitalists to provide just enough economic growth to ensure a base for the collectivization of agriculture and the extermination of millions. Ivy called it *His Master's Voice,* after a phonograph record that constituted one of the most piquant elements at the scene of the crime. Favorable though the book was to the progressive direction of Soviet life, it was too realistic to be publishable in the USSR; Ivy had to be content with a modest edition in English, brought out by Heinemann in 1930. Just how complaisant was the behavior required from even a foreign-born Soviet ambassadorial wife may be gathered from Ivy's utopian words at the front of the 1943 American edition of her book, now entitled *Moscow Mystery*:

> [The book] opens on a "bitter night in February, 1926," beneath the walk of the Kremlin; it ends before the ballet season closes for the summer. That was seventeen years ago. February nights are still bitter cold in Moscow, and the ballet season runs from September to June. But almost everything else has changed . . .
>
> The buildings which have changed the streets of Moscow have changed the lives of the people in the streets. For these buildings were not merely the first modern architecture in Russia—their very functions were new. Their operation brought to the city a new population—office workers to staff the new government departments, bus drivers to drive the new motor-buses, teachers for the new schools, students from all over the Union for the new colleges.
>
> Environment can affect the lives of adults, as well as children. Seventeen years ago it was normal for a night watchman and his entire family to inhabit one room in an old house, and for the night watchman's wife to get up in the morning to make her lodger's tea on a primus stove in the same room. Now it would be normal for them to have street-level apartments with a modern kitchen, in a tall apartment house . . . .

Her one venture in the style of a fellow-traveling Agatha Christie aside, most of Ivy's energies during the period of her husband's rise and subsequent downfall were employed in translating from the Russian, teaching Basic English in the face of the opposition of school administrators, raising her children in what she could manage of an English manner, and indulging a somewhat wayward sexuality. On this subject, Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carswell, quoting Ivy, leaves little room for modesty or perhaps even for romance. In Berlin, she met a German doctor named Kurt, and felt

> sort of happy. Had something I never had before. Beginning with an "o". and now I feel serene, domestic and self-respecting . . . .
>
> [For a later tryst] Kurt arrived at 3. He came straight up to me and we simply fell upon each other with delight. He thought he had never seen me looking so nice and loved my hair. And I thought him ever so much more attractive . . . . [T]here is something clean and compact about him that is almost irresistible. We went together to Friedel's hotel at 6.30 and found her with her friend Beatus and to my dismay an "orgy" all fixed up for us 4 . . . .
>
> I couldn't say anything as they all seemed to want it, but of course what I really wanted was Kurt all to myself. They all agreed that my hair was an enormous improvement and of course Friedel found it "a little perverse" so that was all right. We had a nice dinner and coffee together and I liked Beatus very much. A fat man, distinctly Regency, with an eye-glass and soft white hands. Then we went up to Friedel's really huge room and all undressed and I may say tho' it was rather amusing at moments (especially the eyeglass of Beatus, to which he clung) I got no satisfaction out of the whole evening, tho' Kurt had me at least 4 times and at incredible length. He only had Friedel once and that made me frankly unhappy . . . .
>
> [And on another occasion she observes that] Beatus is infinitely more subtle and intelligent than Kurt . . . . He has not Kurt's marvelous potency and it is obvious that this could not be expected. You can't have everything. Besides he was not bad . . . . What I specially like about Beatus is that he made me feel I was wonderful for him and said he could never forget me, while dear Kurt always makes me feel that it is *he* who is so wonderful. Of course Kurt would hardly have understood a dozen words of mine, our minds are so different . . . .

Despite Maxim's deathbed words to Ivy —"Englishwoman, go home!"—she stayed in the USSR, remaining close to her children (and to theirs: Pavel Litvinov, the celebrated dissident, is her grandson) and cultivating her personal life. Again, Mr. Carswell leaves little to the imagination:

> Even as seventy approached she was not beyond the reach of passion, but now it was unhesitatingly homosexual. She made a note on "Thursday 5th or 6th or I know not what of Feb 1959," from which it is clear that she was having an affair with a woman younger than herself. "Fantastic day ended. Wild, sweet love. My only desire—that any moment of it should go on for ever. Any—doesn't matter which. With her, not so simple."

In 1960, she made an extended visit to England. Many of her contemporaries, including the sometime Communist sympathizer, fine printer, and advertising whiz Francis Meynell and the stalwart Stalinist *cum* natural scientist J. D. Bernal, were still alive, as was a small but comforting English bank account her thoughtful husband had arranged during the early 1930s. Though she felt compelled to return to Russia in 1961, she began to be published as a short-story writer, at first in the as always leftist *New Statesman,* and then after 1966 in *The New Yorker.* In subject matter, her sentimentally cast stories alternated between memories of a turn-of-the-century childhood and personal accounts of the shabby world of shanty *dachas* and crude vacation rooming houses available to the superannuated widow of a half-disgraced and totally discarded diplomat. Many of these stories, with all their echoes of other—and better—women writers, were collected and published in 1971 under the title *She Knew She Was Right.*

In the 1970s Ivy went home to England to die. There, in a tiny apartment outside London, she was surrounded by various émigré members of her family, indulgent friends, and uncounted scraps of disorganized reminiscences. Some words of hers, written in New York in 1943, are used by Mr. Carswell as a motto at the front of his book; they give in themselves an adequate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

account of the quixotic side of Ivy's life and the shallowness and indulgence of her self-image.

> For many years I was obsessed with the idea that God had sent me to Russia for the purpose of being the only English subject in the Soviet Union who could write. By writing I mean doing it so that people wanted to read it all the time they were reading it; they wanted to go on reading it simply for pleasure.

Mr. Carswell ends his book with an ultimately unsatisfying verdict on Ivy: "She was dealt a high card in life, but it was in the wrong suit."

It can hardly be said that Mr. Carswell's work is a brilliant accomplishment in biography. Unfortunately, he often seems unsure in dealing with simple details of twentieth-century political and cultural history. Thus he gives the impression that George V was King of England (rather than Prince of Wales) in 1905, when in fact he did not ascend the throne until 1910. Similarly, Mr. Carswell writes of the "charm of Russia's imperial ballet (which captivated London and Ivy in 1911)"; but this landmark in the evolution of English taste was occasioned not by "Russia's imperial ballet" but by the privately financed and run Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev. Mr. Carswell also manages to be off by one year in dating Maxim Litvinov's agreement with FDR about restoration of US-USSR relations in 1934 (not 1933); he is unclear, too, about the year the Litvinovs both came to Washington for his ambassadorial stint, getting it correctly in one place as 1941 and then suggesting six pages later that Ivy arrived in 1942.

More important by far than these mere details is Mr. Carswell's inability to connect in any evidential way what was going on around Ivy in England before her marriage —with her life, her thought, and the actions she took. There are, for example, many pages in Mr. Carswell's book on the English socialist-Zionist physician David Eder, who married Ivy's aunt Edith. For Mr. Carswell, Eder was the great influence on Ivy: "It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that David Eder was Ivy's second father, more real than Walter [her father], and the very converse of Sandy [her stepfather] . . . . The Eders, husband and wife, stood for all the lost Walter could have offered his bounding daughter." All the more pity, then (given how strongly Mr. Carswell thinks this influence on Ivy), that not one fact based either on Ivy's testimony or on the recollections of intimates is given to support Mr. Carswell's claim.

Though there is much material in this book about the exile Russian revolutionary movement in London and about Maxim's place in it, there is no material connecting Ivy in any real way either with the movement or with her future husband's life. Instead we are given, time and again, suppositions:

> One wonders if Ivy ever bargained for a husband whose chief resolve was now [1917] to return to Russia in the certainty that he was destined to play an important part in its revolution. She believed in freedom and progress, she was glad the Tsar was overthrown, but she had no deeply rooted political convictions. Her ambitions were literary. Yet if she wanted to keep the stability Maxim represented for her, with his maps, his neatness, his caution about money, his devotion to their children, she would have to follow him into the fearful adventure of the Revolution.

It is clear that rather than provide an intellectually coherent and disciplined biography, Mr. Carswell has given us a personally written and influenced (his mother was one of Ivy's closest friends over many years and he himself knew Ivy in her last years) life-and-times based on linkage by speculation rather than evidence. The result of all this suggestive writing is that we emerge from Mr. Carswell's book no wiser about the real significance of this impulsive and often foolish woman who, though failing to be a major writer, has nonetheless much to reveal as a mirror to her times.

One aspect of her—and her husband's—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirroring function derives from the simple fact of their physical survival during the Soviet nightmare. On this score Mr. Carswell gives fascinating material about Maxim's disillusionment with Stalin's regime, a disillusionment he put into action by setting up an English bank account and by talking against Soviet policies to State Department official Sumner Welles in 1943 and to the American journalist Richard C. Hottelet in 1945. Even more damningly, he arranged for Ivy to place some of his papers in a numbered New York safe-deposit box in 1943.[2] As to why the Litvinovs survived, Mr. Carswell advances several explanations he himself calls "all equally speculative and unconvincing." These range from Stalin's affection, his reward for faithful service, and his desire to keep Litvinov, as it were, in cold storage for future use, to his desire not to destroy "a Bolshevik of the first generation who had a unique understanding of the West" and with whose policy, in any case, Stalin himself had been associated.

Toward the book's end Mr. Carswell adds another and more compelling reason why Litvinov (and his wife) survived:

> In the Bolshevik system, even in the bloody mind of Stalin, there lay a calculation that the possibility of Western approval must never wholly be discarded. Total isolation, absolute defiance, were positions to be avoided, and the destruction of Litvinov would have violated this instinct . . . . Almost alone among the Soviet leadership he had a constituency in the West which had come to associate him personally with disarmament, resistance to fascism, and collective security; and it was a constituency which extended to the highest levels among senior statesmen who felt he would keep his word. His opinion may not have counted for much in the high policy of the Kremlin, but his standing abroad was a factor in its calculations.

Since Mr. Carswell has gotten as far as identifying world opinion as a "factor in [Soviet] calculations," it is a pity he does not go on to identify just what segments in the West were considered to be most important in the Kremlin scheme: the world of progressive opinion that shades gradually from fellow-traveling on the Left to the high-minded liberalism of what passes for the center of democratic societies. For this motley cast of political half-thinkers, Maxim Litvinov was, and, to judge from the evidence of William L. Shirer's recently published volume of memoirs,[3] remains, a personal symbol of a proper former revolutionary. Unmistakably Jewish but never a Zionist, dedicated to principle but cannily toughminded, personally nonviolent but a loyal representative of massive military power, an enemy of right-wing fascism who could put the best face on its Communist analogue, Litvinov sublimely represents the addled idea that one can run a bloody revolution and immediately thereupon love mankind forever after. That Stalin

2 The fate of these papers in itself makes up an illuminating chapter in the perils of resistance to Soviet policy: though Ivy, before leaving America in 1943, had entrusted the safe-deposit-box key to "an American friend," some time after Maxim's death she found herself summoned to the Lubyanka prison, where she was faced with, and interrogated about, the supposedly hidden documents. Unfortunately, Mr. Carswell gives neither the name of the "American friend" nor even the date of Ivy's potentially fatal encounter with the Soviet authorities.

3 *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940,* by William L. Shirer (Little, Brown). In this, the second volume of his memoirs, the famous war correspondent paints Litvinov as directly tied to the Soviet measures he advocated: "Maxim Litvinov, the longtime Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, had staked his reputation and career on building up collective security against Nazi Germany. He thought a united front of the two Western powers and the Soviet Union . . . was the only means of deterring Hitler . . . . Undaunted by Chamberlain's rejection . . . Litvinov called in the British ambassador in Moscow on April 16 [1939] and made a formal proposal for a triple pact . . . . It was Litvinov's last bid to the West to join Russia in stopping Hitler . . . . But Chamberlain stalled, and this was fatal to Litvinov."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and his successors have understood how to appeal to this large political grouping outside the walls of their own prison has been clear from the palmy days of the Popular Front to the present nuclear freeze movement; the Litvinovs' survival is but one more example of the old truth that the USSR is a devoted respecter and follower of public opinion—always abroad, never at home.

More complicated to assess is the way in which Ivy Litvinov as a woman and a writer reflected the worlds in which she grew up and in which she chose to live. Mr. Carswell quite properly devotes much space to an account of her family background, with its not unusual example of mid-nineteenth-century Jewish émigré seriousness channeled at one and the same time into capitalist business activity and philosophical rationalism. Ivy's grandfather, Maximilian Löwe, was both a speculator in the City of London and a founder, along with Charles Darwin and two members of the Wedgewood family, of a heretical free-thinking congregation led by Charles Voysey, an important mid-Victorian dissenter. That such a movement away from what might have been thought traditional English religious beliefs was not incompatible with outspoken imperialism and patriotism needs no more demonstration than a quotation from the entry on Maximilian's son (and Ivy's uncle) Sidney contained in the *Concise Dictionary of National Biography*:

> LOW, Sir SIDNEY JAMES MARK (1857-1932), author and journalist; educated at King's College School and Balliol College, Oxford; first class, modern history, 1879; brilliant editor of *St. James's Gazette,* 1888-97; ardent imperialist and friend of Rhodes, Cromer, Curzon, Milner [qq.v.], &c.; works include *The Governance of England* (1904) and *A Vision of India* (1906); knighted, 1918.

But late nineteenth-century England, and not just Tsarist Russia, was of course the scene of a great battle between fathers and sons—and daughters too. Ivy did not follow the path of her Uncle Sidney. Instead, like so many intellectually inclined young women of the day, she chose to follow the path of literary self-expression. Mr. Carswell notes at some length the possible roots of this self-expression, among which he lists her father's forebears, her mother's Anglo-Indian military background, the interest of the educated English public at the turn of the century in foreign and especially Russian literature, and the general presence of progressive ideas in the air. Unfortunately, Mr. Carswell does not really press on to document in Ivy's own words the extent to which she became a purposeful carrier of what was enlightened progressive opinion just before World War I, and what remains so today as well.

Certainly evidence for Ivy's opinions *before* her encounter with Maxim is hardly lacking. Just because her lifelong literary product was always so autobiographical, her two novels[4] of 1913 and 1914 respectively provide much material as to how she viewed herself and her world; it is perhaps the major flaw of Mr. Carswell's book that he gives little consideration to these basic documents.

Growing Pains, the first of these two novels, is a curious amalgam of complaint and self-satisfaction, of protest and sentimentality. The story of a girl at the beginning of the novel still a small child, the novel charts an orphan's course through the ministrations of an aunt, a puritanical nanny, and an intellectually disreputable and blindly authoritarian boarding school, and the delicious tortures of first encounters with potential suitors and other men. Here, in the first large literary canvas of a woman in her mid-twenties, are set out all the discontents and fantasies that, without being cast in political form, are the necessary personal foundations for a politics of utopian protest.

This, for example, is the six-year-old Gertrude's experience of adult morality and the attempt to teach it:

4 Both these books are now difficult to obtain, at least in this country. I am indebted to the research collections of the New York Public Library and Stanford University for making reproductions of them available to me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, you do as I tell you, and pop into that there drawer, and bring out that there small paper-bag!"

She broke out into triumphant laughter at the sight of Gertrude's bewildered face.

Gertrude duly went through the process described by Ada as running into her drawer, and produced the small bag. She laid it on the table in front of Ada, and walked slowly towards the kitchen door, trying to look unconscious. At the door she was summoned by Ada's voice, as she had expected to be.

"'Ere!" said Ada, "I arst you to bring me that bag, but I never arst you to 'elp yourself."

"I didn't!" said Gertrude indignantly. "I never touched one of them!"

"Never touched one of what, miss? You tell me that!"

"Never touched one of the sweets!"

Delighted at the success of her little ruse, Ada pointed a menacing finger at her charge.

"Well, then, you tell me this," she said, "if you never took one of them, 'ow did you know as they were sweets in the bag?"

Gertrude hung her head miserably.

"I never touched one of them!"

"If you did," said Ada, "kindly remember that over my dressing-table is the words 'Thou God seest me,' and nex' time I sees them words I shall know whether or not you're telling the truth, young lady!"

Gertrude was alarmed. She really had not taken a sweet, but she had a nasty feeling that the text might play her false.

From this account of the deceit of those in power it is hardly far to a discovery of hypocrisy at work even in Gertrude's contemporaries:

> Someone struck up a tune, and the *Veni Creator Spiritus* was begun.
>
> "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire" ("Oh, *please,* Holy Ghost!" whispered Gertrude, under cover of the music), "and lighten with celestial fire."
>
> Gertrude looked at her schoolfellows as they droned out the majestic words. The same expression of bored submission was apparent on every face.
>
> "They don't believe in it any more than I do," she thought. "If the Holy Ghost really *did* come into the dining-room, I believe they'd be horribly shocked."
>
> The hymn was over, seats were resumed, and Bibles produced. The resemblance to the usual weekly Scripture lesson was marked. References were looked up, and the meaning of the original Hebrew for various words carefully explained. Gertrude, who had vaguely hoped for some soothing of the perpetual dull ache at her heart, was scarcely disappointed. She had only faintly hoped.

The result of all this was alienation, not just from her peers and the world, but also from herself:

> When the girls were filing out of the room, Mademoiselle laid a detaining hand on Gertrude's arm. In a miserable state of defiance, fear, and disgust, Gertrude remained rigid. Her throat became suddenly dry. She had an overpowering sense of *inward failure* [emphasis in the original]. She described it to herself as "feeling as if she had no inside." The sensation was so strong that she wondered how it was she did not double up like a paper doll.

Growing Pains gives us too a picture of that drive to sisterhood which is a natural concomitant of feminine disquiet:

> Her new passion, together with the slow awakening of adolescence, burned as a consuming fire in the breast of Gertrude. The very sight of Madge was enough to set her senses reeling, and when she came upon that sight unexpectedly, she would feel giddy and faint and often be forced to sit down very quickly.

Not surprisingly, given the surpassing aestheticism of the years just before World War I, art comes to Gertrude's rescue. But this is art not as craft, but as feeling:

> "If you won't work, Gertrude, it's no use your ever hoping to draw," [her art teacher] said decisively.
>
> "It isn't won't—it's can't," protested Gertrude.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> "Nonsense! You've far more talent than Amy Nelson, and yet she's always ahead of you. Besides, when you choose you can do very well indeed."
>
> "You don't understand. It's not when I *choose* —it's if I can *feel* like it. I can't ever feel those silly old melons and loaves and things, so it's useless my trying to draw them. [Emphasis in the original].

Despite her inability to see art as anything but self-expression, for Gertrude the power of the gospel of beauty was all-conquering:

> It was a bright day in June, and the sun flooded her bedroom through the blind, and aroused her earlier than usual. Her eyes fell on the jug and basin on her washing-stand.
>
> "Well, I never noticed that before!" said Gertrude rubbing her eyes. "That jug is beautiful! What a glorious color! How happy it makes me! But how silly! Why should a beautiful jug make me happy?"

Now the turning point of Gertrude's life—and of the novel as well—is at hand. It comes—surprise!—through art. An older man to whom she is already attracted invites her to an art exhibition where some of his paintings are on view. Gertrude is drawn inexorably to his picture of a flower; here, through the experience of art, she reaches maturity:

> "As Gertrude looked, memories rushed back upon her of a morning in spring when for the first time she fell in love with Beauty . . . . Gertrude sat down; she felt a little faint with happiness. She saw in a dream her darkened, sordid life lit up, ennobled, and made significant by the pure light of visible beauty. She felt purged, as by a coal from the Altar of Heaven, as she realized what scales had fallen from her eyes . . . . Gertrude knew that she was at last in touch with the Real in human relations, and the solemnity of that knowledge compelled sincerity with herself.

Growing Pains ends with an enthusiastic descent into conventional sentimentality. Gertrude marries her artist, finds married love in his arms "immeasurably dear." On the next to last page of the book, the following treacly exchange between husband and wife takes place, ever so delicately hinting at pregnancy:

> "Won't you sit down?" said Don. "You're looking *very* well. Been to many theatres lately?"
>
> "No," said Gertrude primly. "I hardly ever go out at night. My husband doesn't care for it, and, besides, I have to take care of myself now."
>
> "Darling!" said Don, suddenly serious, "are you *really* well?
>
> Do you really take care of yourself?"
>
> "Old silly! Of course! 'Yes' to both."

Ivy's next novel, *The Questing Beast,* published just one year later in 1914 by Martin Secker, is modeled closely on the writer's own experience as an employee at the Prudential Assurance Company. Despite the fact that the Prudential was one of the most humane and enlightened employers of its time, Ivy's reaction to her work was one of revulsion, which she described in "Pru Girl," a story printed in her 1971 collection:

> Eileen was even unhappier at the Pru than she had anticipated. The girl clerks were utterly uninteresting to her, and as for niceness they were mostly the daughters of small tradesmen and bank clerks. They thought Eileen a mass of affectation with her unmanicured hands and her poetry books and high-brow novels. They themselves scarcely noticed the names of authors and eagerly followed the serial in the daily paper their fathers took in; they even discussed the heroines in Sweetheart Novelettes and other orange-covered booklets that until now Eileen had never seen anywhere but in the drawer of the kitchen dresser. For six months the only work entrusted to her was the copying of names, addresses, and policy numbers out of dirty ledgers into clean ones, omitting heavily erased canceled policies. If she made the slightest slip, the supervisor tore the whole page out of the ledger without a word.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Later she was given letters to type, teaching herself as she worked from the company book of instructions. For one week a month everyone had to take a turn at the loathed addressograph.

Like the much later short story, *The Questing Beast* carries the private discontents of *Growing Pains* into the wider world of the work place. Now the heroine is Rachel Cohen, a desperately lonely girl who turns out from the beginning of the novel to be a true literary intellectual. Like Ivy, she doesn't like her job. The first chapter of the book is called "Late!" and the second "Penal Servitude"; it seems that Rachel can't manage to get up early enough to get to her jail-like work on time. The atmosphere in the novel is the same as in the much later "Pru Girl":

> At about twelve o'clock the menu for the day was passed round the desk, amid derogatory remarks.
>
> After eating her lunch, Rachel kept apart from her colleagues. She found a small volume of poetry in her desk, and with this she retired to a warm and comfortable seat in the lounge. She did not read, however, but stared into the fire in sullen misery. She had been two years in the office now, and was not yet used to it, nor reconciled to her fate. She was, if anything, a shade more miserable than she had been at first, because she felt more dully hopeless. The first month had been one of such wild torture that she had not believed it could last. She had felt like a child who is being punished by being made to stand in the corner, and who turns round every minute, expectant of release—but now, having endured for many months, she began to see no reason why it should not go on for ever. It gradually sank into her, too, that many of her colleagues had been over thirty years in the office, and among them were some who must have minded as much as she did at first . . . .

A new element is added. For the causes of Rachel's habitual tardiness at work (she is otherwise, by all accounts, a highly competent employee) are literary: she reads passionately—*Anna Karenina* and other serious things—and she writes. For her, the act of writing is indeed all-absorbing:

> She wrote steadily for nearly an hour and a half. Somewhere in the house a door banged perpetually. Each report smote her senses. Rachel frowned nervously, but the reason of the annoyance did not penetrate her consciousness for a long time. When it did, she started to her feet to go out and shut the door. In the middle of the room she stood quite still and wondered why she had got up. She looked about the room for suggestions, but finding none, sat down again and took up her pen. The door banged again. "Of course!" said Rachel, and starting up again ran to close it. She came back and went on writing. A passing breeze shook the wind-bell, and at its sweet, faint music Rachel looked up and smiled.
>
> It is an ill thing for your night's rest to write until a late hour, and by the time Rachel had "written herself out" she knew that she could not hope to sleep for many hours. "I shall be lucky if I don't hear it strike three," she told herself.
>
> Over her supper of bread and milk she read what she had written. It was a short story, about five thousand words in length . . . . The central idea was just what might have been expected from a young girl in Ray's position—in fact it was inspired by her constant and enthusiastic reading of Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. (She was just like all the other intellectual young people of to-day.) . . . .
>
> The story . . . was neither ineffective nor ill-written. (It was noticeably free from *clichés*.) It left its author exhausted and exalted, but little prepared for the tiring morrow. Now, however, her aching limbs and inflamed eyes were no longer a grievance.
>
> Is not the soul more than the body?

Suddenly, about a third of the way through the book, Rachel meets a man to whom she is attracted—the first (for there are in fact three in all) Questing Beast of the title. Beast number one is a quintessential cad named Giles Goodey, a married man who (under the cover of intellectual friend-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ship) brings something new to Rachel's life:

> Rachel was giving herself surprises. She was discovering weaknesses in herself—one in particular. This particular weakness was a tendency to enjoy having her hand held by a man whose conversation bored her and whose mind she despised, and this and kindred but infinitestimal [*sic*] favours were sufficient to keep Giles in attendance on her. Subconsciously he knew what Rachel was to learn in conscious bitterness, that there was a bond between them and a plane on which they could meet with perfect sympathy, a plane on which nature was striving to place them. Rachel, after her first shock at the revelation of this weakness in herself, treated it rather as another woman would treat in herself a sudden desire for a cup of tea with her lunch: the approved treatment is to say: "I musn't become dependent on it," and to continue in the indulgence. And after all, was it an indulgence, or was it simply that it was rather less boring to submit to mild caresses than to have to respond to Giles's conversation?

Giles and Rachel have an affair, complete with (as the affair seems to be coming to an end) his copying out a sonnet for her. But it is her decision to break matters off, and when she does so Ivy's description of Rachel once again strikes the note of female ascendancy so charactersitic of all her writing:

> But because he [Giles] was an incurable *poseur,* it must not be imagined that he did not suffer. In the end he suffered more than Rachel, because he loved her, body and soul, and she, as she said, had never loved him.

Though the couple meet soon again—when in Ivy's tremulous words, Rachel "only caught one terrified breath and submitted"—a new affair is now at hand. Noel Young, a brother of one co-worker and the fiancé of another (and himself an employee in the insurance office), appears on the horizon, and once more Rachel is attracted. This time it is not only the man who, for Rachel, is the Questing Beast: this time it is also Rachel herself who engages on the great quest. She attempts to give Noel up, not viewing the renunciation as a total loss:

> But Rachel was not altogether unhappy. What had once seemed a tragedy—the necessity of her daily attendance at the office—became an unnoticed part of her life, and she was upheld by the knowledge that Noel loved her and that she had acted unselfishly in leaving him. She had begun to write regularly now. It had once come to her to think: "I believe I could write a novel." At first she had put away the idea, believing that greater leisure and quiet than she enjoyed must be necessary for such a stupendous achievement. She began the first chapter once, but destroyed it a week later. She was in no doubt as to her literary gift, but what she had written down seemed to her so unlike the novels she had read that she decided it would not do. She knew that she had some ideas to express . . . . It became a strong obsession, this longing to write in the first person, and to describe herself in detail . . . . She knew, now, that she was going to write about herself . . . .

Finally what had remained until that moment an *affaire blanche* is consummated—but not until Rachel reads Noel the early part of her manuscript. With a friend's counsel, Noel finds a way to rationalize going back to his betrothed on the grounds that Rachel has had a lover before him. Ivy's contempt for traditional male morality couldn't be clearer:

> Alas, for chivalry! Noel began to feel quite differently about Rachel, when he saw the attitude that a decent man like Humphreys adopted. He began to think that the fact of Rachel having had a lover before did make all the difference. What had happened would have been impossible with some girls. With Frances, for instance. Never had Frances seemed so far-away, so unapproachable. Oh, let us give it a name! So desirable!

Rachel is in despair. Once again, her literary vocation points the way:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> "I will not go under," she said defiantly. "No man on earth is worth going to pieces over."
>
> She took out her manuscript again . . . . Once she had got to work her pen flew over the paper for hours at a time, and she was able to forget the heaviest part of her grief, and to recover some of her self-respect in the spectacle of her industry and the quality of some of the work that she did in those dark hours.

Now too she is pregnant. Her new landlady befriends her, and with the help of the women in the office, who type her manuscript, the novel is made ready. It is accepted by a publisher, and soon Rachel is looking forward to twin blessed events: "My two babies," she tells her landlady, "will be born in the same month." Soon she has both a child and a literary success.

In the epilogue of *The Questing Beast,* Noel comes several years later to visit Rachel at the seaside. He is greeted by a small boy named Noel, and when he asks Rachel where her husband is, he is soon made to realize that the child is his. But far from asking for sympathy, Rachel makes clear her desire to raise the child herself without a father as she pursues her literary vocation. The novel ends with a strong demonstration of sisterhood by Rachel and her landlady, leaving Noel an unwanted intruder in a community of women. As Noel walks away, the book ends with these words:

> Presently a motor-horn began to sound incessantly, and he guessed that young Noel was investigating the car. He felt bitterly that it was hard on a man to have no right to tell his own son to shut up making such an infernal row.

For all their defects of tone and literary construction, these novels remain, even seven decades later, implicit with life. The life which they contain was never matched by Ivy Litvinov in her later writing, which at its best seems a stale rehash of old memories of an England now foreign or a retelling of scenes from Russian life better done by native practitioners. Just because of the pulsing vitality which marks these two early novels, one cannot help asking one question: what happened to this spirit when Ivy Low married?

It is tempting indeed to answer this question as Mr. Carswell does: Ivy Low as Ivy Litvinov was a person in the wrong situation. To answer the question in this way, however, is to place all the burden of explanation for what happened to this writer on her experiences and fate in the Soviet Union after her marriage. But this answer, comforting as it may be for those who think that the demonic name of Stalin can explain all the evil in what would have otherwise been a noble experiment, fails to take account of the *cul de sac* inherent in the ideas from which Ivy first wrote and which she espoused with so much energy.

Ironically, what must have seemed before World War I as the freeing of the human spirit ended in a creative drought. The Victorian emphasis on moral uplift and the progress of science and through science was succeeded by a belief in what would now be called human potential. The particular contribution of the intellectual figures of the 1890s and after to the discussion of values was to place uplift, scientific thought, and the future of the individual in opposition, not just to the state, but to the very idea of a traditionally established order.

For Ivy Litvinov as for so many of the best and brightest of the day, life as a social process was defined as a struggle against obscurantist, even where not actually vicious and exploitative, repression. For her (despite some strong early positive inclinations), religion was a sham, bourgeois morality was a farce, marriage was a legal union in which the man did not love and the woman could not trust, work as it must be done by the millions was drudgery and boredom, and sexual passion was transitory and incomplete. Politics, as we know both from Mr. Carswell's book and from the evidence of Ivy's writing, was a matter of little importance.

What, then, remained? Only self-expression. But even for an artist the self cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be taken for granted; self-expression, after all, must have something to express. That something, though mediated by the self, is nonetheless the world of people and things. To construe it as a whole generation of educated writers at the turn of the century did as the destructive encounter of the self with society is to deny the author the only subject matter he can communicate to others. To say this is not to ask for socialist realism or for the support of any particular established order; it is only to suggest that a writer who does not go toward the world cannot in the long run continue speaking to it.

Doubtless we shall never know just why Ivy Low married Maxim Litvinov. Surely she must have found the new world of her husband's revolutionary activities and friends an attractive change from the English society from which she felt she had suffered so much. Unfortunately, the Soviet world which Ivy soon encountered was a world even less attractive to her than that which she had left. All the promises of human liberation which sounded from every Bolshevik organ soon metamorphosed not just into sham, but into murder.[5] For Ivy the result was twofold: on the physical level a descent into aimless, tortured sexual promiscuity, and on the literary level a flight into hackwork and the endless reworking of old memories. All that was left to her in the Soviet Union was thus the cultivation of the weaknesses, both personal and literary, which marred even her pre-revolutionary work.

Mr. Carswell has chosen to begin the title of his book with the word "Exile." Whether or not he intended it, in the case of Ivy Litvinov, exile has two meanings: flight from her land and alienation from her own social world and even from her own deepest self. In our time the profession of exile is an honored one, and its favorable associations should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Ivy Litvinov was an exile from a democratic England by her own choice; that this condition robbed her later writing of contact with her own world; that by an irony of fate she was to become an exile even in a social system she must, however fuzzily, have once admired in potential. Because the notion of survival is so closely linked with exile, we should be careful too to avoid seeing her long life as a simple validation of her existence. Vyacheslav Molotov, after all, has also survived, in his case into an honored and indubitably old age.

For those who, like Mr. Carswell, must look for a rationalization of the troubled life and ugly times of Ivy Litvinov, perhaps the simplest formulation is the best; she reflected the forces that made her what she was. A wiser choice, made early, might have averted the evil decree for her, as for so many of our century's other lost souls.

5 It should be made clear that, for all Ivy's apolitical stance, she was, for much of the period of her husband's success, aware of the true state of affairs in Stalin's Russia; this is made abundantly clear by Mr. Carswell's inclusion of a horrifying extract from a tape made by Ivy in 1960-61 concerning the fate of Rose Cohen, an Englishwoman married to a Ukrainian Communist and murdered by Stalin despite Ivy's attempt to secure the intercession of Harry Pollitt, the head of the English Communist Party.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Watteau in Washington

by Jed Perl

The three-hundredth-birthday exhibition of paintings and drawings by Watteau currently at the National Gallery of Art in Washington is spellbinding.[1] I felt euphoric as I explored the three rooms full of paintings. *Gersaint's Shopsign* struck me as one of the masterpieces of Western art, comparable in the largeness of its achievement to the Parthenon frieze, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment,* and some of Rembrandt's self-portraits. Yet every time I try to account, in words, for my experience of Watteau's paintings, what I write seems strangely out of scale. Of the supremely rich *Pleasures of the Dance* I made these notes while I was at the show: "Blue-gray-green-mauve parks. Distances that give out in strokes of paint. Gowns of yellow, gray, pink, dark blue, ruby red, green, green-blue." These phrases suggest prettiness, something illustrative—not Watteau. Watteau's paintings defy description. They also defy interpretation, as Pierre Rosenberg, one of the curators of the exhibition, recently observed.

The Goncourt brothers, Watteau's most important nineteenth-century admirers, use a metaphor to evoke his art that at first struck me as a bit odd. They describe Watteau as a divine *couturier,* at work with his scissors. This puts one in mind of Matisse, who said of his paper cutouts that he drew them with the scissors. What the Goncourts surely mean to suggest about Watteau is a freedom of invention not unlike Matisse's: Watteau's marvelous formal improvisation, the way he seems to cut great things out of thin air. The Goncourt's metaphor is a surprising kind of compliment; it invites one to judge Watteau in terms of his stylishness. I would not want to think of him as a painter of fashions or manners, but in some large way a care for style is at the heart of his work.

Nowadays, style often implies a choice (as in "life style") or something negative (as in "it's just a style"). What style meant for Watteau is a great question. His art, like much of the best art and architecture of the early eighteenth century—for instance, the pilgrimage churches of Germany and Austria—might be called late Baroque. Watteau loved the great monarchist outpourings of Rubens's Maria de' Medici cycle, yet some of his own earliest known works, which were decorations done for the Hôtel Nointel in Paris around 1707, are in the light, intimist vein of the young rococo style. Wat-

1 "Watteau: 1684-1721" is on view at the National Gallery from June 17 through September 23. It will travel from there to the Grand Palais in Paris (October 25 through January 25, 1985) and to Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin (February 22 through May 26, 1985). The curators of the exhibition are Margaret Morgan Grasselli and Pierre Rosenberg. The exhibition catalogue, *Watteau: 1684-1721* (534 pages, $24.95), was published by the National Gallery of Art and contains an essay on Watteau's drawings by Mrs. Grasselli and an essay on Watteau's paintings by Mr. Rosenberg.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teau's moment was the one when manners in the sense of the established decorum of Versailles were collapsing into an idea of style as provisional, invented. Watteau's pictures—which present a loose baggage of discordant costumes, everyday and theatrical—exemplify personal style. This is a concocted world, spun out of Watteau's odd and delicate sense of the tremors moving through Paris in the wake of the Sun King, three quarters of a century before the Revolution. The images of Watteau's art are seismographic, registering in their slightly nervous, wiry arabesques the movements of society. In Boucher's portrait drawing of Watteau, the artist looks small, quick, sharp-eyed: like a man who carries no excess baggage. Watteau is an anatomist of fashion, and, like any great scientist, is without a trace of sentimentality. He leaves the common incidents of life deboned. He exposes the structures of love and manners that guide his own movements just as they guide the movements of all those around him. Watteau defined the style of his period in a way that has no parallel in recent art. In modern times some artists—Sonia Delaunay, members of the De Stijl and Bauhaus groups—have at one time or another affected visual style, but what modern visual artist has discovered the structure of his art within a study of style in love and manners?

The great tricks of Watteau's art recall not so much the high-art tradition of which he is so illustrious a part as they recall the art of supreme jazz and night club singers. When the great singer walks into the room to perform, all the little matters of style are critical: the shawl, the flower, the dinner jacket, the hat. The great singer is supremely stylish. Not because style is at the essence of things, but because it is partly through an absolute mastery of style—of the way things are done—that the singer triumphs over the everyday. The singer describes, like Watteau, the simple events of the stylish world: a great evening, a bouquet, a flirtation, the image of a cad, a goodbye. The bare lyrics of the songs are, one might say, like Watteau's sublime drawings: well-observed incidents. What Watteau the painter does is what the great singers do: his paint, like their voices, colors the incidents, gives them emotional weight. When one speaks of great style, one means that style has become almost transparent. Watteau and the great singers go further, for they bring to the analysis of style the wider moral world one associates with art. In the great moments in the jazz rooms and within the magical aura of Watteau's paintings style is somehow coaxed into art. Style surprises itself. It goes off balance and turns into something it never was before: bare fact, absolutely true.

The problems of Watteau connoisseurship are enormous. Watteau was inattentive to painting craft in such a way that the canvases have needed—or, at least, attracted—much extensive restoration, and one feels this in many of the paintings. Watteau signed and dated nothing and was famous enough to quickly attract copyists and forgers. The catalogue of the Watteau retrospective is full of questions, disputes, changed minds: these are common in all matters of old masters, but seem especially frequent with Watteau. Watteau's art, like that of another one of the immortals, Paul Klee, is emblematic in private ways and will not yield up its meanings to conventional iconographic and allegorical explanation. Historians who take a conventional art-historical approach to Watteau seem to make of him another painter—heavier, diminished.

In the case of Watteau, art history is most helpful when it illuminates the social and artistic landscape out of which the art was born. This is an extremely difficult task, for Watteau, partly because he died relatively young (at age thirty-six) and partly because he was something of a recluse, never developed an easily definable social or artistic circle. In Donald Posner's excellent new monograph, *Antoine Watteau,*[2] the artist's early years and insecure social ties are laid in with exceptional delicacy. Posner knows the

2 *Antoine Watteau,* by Donald Posner; Cornell University Press, 288 pages, $75.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

limits of the biographical approach; he is also careful to avoid overinterpretation. He goes so far as to argue that Watteau himself may not have been sure if *The Pilgrimage to the Island of Cythera*— Watteau's most famous painting, of which there are two versions—depicts an arrival or a departure; for Posner it is a poem on the Cythera theme, and can absorb a number of meanings. If Posner is skeptical about an iconographic approach to Watteau, he also rejects the idea—according to him, it is a nineteenth-century invention—that Watteau wanted to convey some sense of equivocation or drift at the center of experience. Posner is right, I think, to emphasize the specificity of Watteau's figures. The high point of his book is the section called "People in Pictures and Pictures of People," where he manages—through a close analysis of documentable instances of Watteau's use of the faces or body types of friends—to provide a rare insight into Watteau's thought processes and working methods. Certainly one of the factors that sets Watteau's art on a plane far above Fragonard's and Boucher's—the two eighteenth-century painters with whom he is so often compared—is the clarity and urgency that Watteau brings to his rendering of gestures and physiognomies. Posner reads in Watteau's figures a gesture language that yields up some rather sharply drawn dramas of pursuit, flirtation, and consummation. To Posner, Watteau's paintings appear purposeful: they depict the stages of love.

I went to the Watteau exhibit expecting sex drama, which is what Posner finds in the paintings; what I found was something rather different. Looking straight at the paintings, one is overcome not by what these figures might be capable of but by their extraordinary presence. Watching the figures in Watteau's great pictures is rather like those chance moments on the street or in a restaurant when one suddenly spies, at a distance and an odd angle, figures who seem to invent, through the loveliness of their looks or movements, a new ideal of beauty or deportment. It is important to remember that Watteau rejected the practice of Rubens and most other previous figure painters, who depicted clearly identifiable characters and stories. How useful those pieces of myth, literature, and religion were for the artist: they gave him a set of coordinates that helped relate the picture to a larger, external reality. Watteau will not let the mind wander. In Watteau there is nothing but the moment of the painting, and the only transformation that one is aware of is the painterly process, reminiscent of Giorgione, by which the sensuous surfaces of paint are turned before one's eyes into the seductive forms of men, women, dogs, fine fabrics, water, trees, and sky.

Watteau's idiosyncratic turn of mind meant that he could work in no established genre. The scenes of figures moving through mirage-like garden settings that absorbed him for most of his career were so unusual that the French Academy, in accepting him as a member, had to invent a new term for his paintings: *fêtes galantes.* His last masterwork, *Gersaint's Shopsign,* designed to hang high up on the facade of the shop of Watteau's friend and dealer Gersaint, was, technically, a sort of decorative panel. What a strange painting it is. The center is almost empty, with only an open doorway leading, beguilingly, to a light-drenched room beyond. The many incidents in the painting do not seem to go together. At left, there is the famous scene of Louis XIV's portrait being packed into a crate—always cited as an emblem of the waning of the world of the Sun King. There is one of Watteau's signature enigma women—all back, no hands, like some strange dream phantom—stepping up from the cobblestones as a man's hand reaches out to her. At right a couple examines a large oval painting: the lady looks at the landscape while the man peers at the female nudes. Further to the right a younger man, his hand on his cheek, looks admiringly at his fine features in a mirror. In sign painting, in prints dealing with the trades, there are surely precedents for the subject and treatment of *Gersaint's Shopsign,* but Watteau's idea of casting his theme of urban commerce on so large a scale and then carry-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing it through with all the gravity that he gave to his most important *fêtes galantes* creates in *Gersaint's Shopsign* not a spectacular eighteenth-century genre scene but a painting of modern life with some of the heroic monumentality of Renaissance wall painting.

One cannot help being struck by the size of this picture—ten-feet wide, it is much larger than anything else Watteau ever did—and the way the cobblestoned street stretching across the entire foreground seems to place one at a dramatic distance from the figures. When Watteau painted *Gersaint's Shopsign* the top edge was curved, which gave to its very horizontal shape a quality of compression that is somewhat altered by the addition, most probably done early in the eighteenth century, of more canvas at the top. I imagine, though, that then as now, the general format—a rectangle, twice as long as it is high—and the disposition of figures along the surface gave the painting some of the quality of a frieze. The general configuration of *Gersaint's Shopsign* does not suggest great depth. The back wall of the shop, hung with the rectangles of framed pictures, reinforces the general frontality of the image. And yet, perhaps partly because one's eye has to travel over the cobblestones to get into the action, it is a painting that one has an overpowering sense of slipping or sinking into.

At the National Gallery I spent a great deal of time looking at *Gersaint's Shopsign*; it put me in a state as close to bliss as I can recall feeling in front of any work of art. Above all, as I looked at the painting it struck me as a miracle of realization in which spatial relations, facial expressions, gestures, and textures are evoked less through color or drawing or overall design than through the varying touch and attack of the artist's brush. (When the handling in a Watteau painting looks even, as in the National Gallery's *Italian Comedians,* one knows that something is amiss: Pierre Rosenberg argues in the catalogue that this painting is a case of over-restoration, Donald Posner that it is a copy of a painting by Watteau.) The shifts in focus in *Gersaint's Shopsign* transport one from the glittering particularity of the gowns of several of the major female figures to the softer, brushier handling of the figure putting the portrait of Louis XIV in the packing case and the couple examining the oval painting. Though none of the effects in *Gersaint's Shopsign* feel like an accident, none seem exactly planned either. One could describe dozens of correspondences—the curl of a wig to the curling rococo decoration of a clock; diagonals and angles repeated in clusters and sprays across the surface; fade-ins and fade-outs—but they are the kinds of effects, somehow flowing out of the very act of the artist's brush, that die in the describing. To describe is to conceptualize—something one would not want to do in the face of this inexhaustible but pre-eminently instinctual work of the imagination.

Painting, politics, love, vanity, commerce, sight: in *Gersaint's Shopsign* Watteau stops in at each of these great themes and then passes on. The themes don't particularly interlock, but to say that the painting is about how things do not cohere gives it a wrongly modernist cast. One feels the piquancy of all these events one by one, and the resolution is purely pictorial—a silent resolution, as it were. Standing before *Gersaint's Shopsign,* I felt the painting's grandfather status: out of this comes Courbet's *Artist's Studio,* some Manets, much of Seurat, Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party,* a certain type of Léger, Balthus's *Passage du Commerce Saint-André,* Giacometti's sculptures of city squares, and Jean Helion's street-scene triptychs. Thinking about that lineage one sees how pictorial ideas have a way of taking on meaning as they are taken up by different artists. Most glorious in *Gersaint's Shopsign* is the openness of its meaning: the refusal of the picture, despite all its richness of insight, to propound a single view.

Gersaint's Shopsign, perhaps more than anything else in Watteau's art, stands with certain works of Poussin and Chardin in defining that miracle of European culture, French

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

painting. Watteau was born in Valenciennes, a Flemish town then only recently under French rule, but his art is for this nonetheless a cornerstone of French painting, which, unlike Italian painting, is to a considerable degree (think of Cubism) a creation of outsiders. One goes to the Watteau exhibition looking for French painting—at least I did. Watteau's Frenchness, like Poussin's in the previous century and Chardin's some decades later, reshapes the natural world in terms of rhythms, textures, and relationships of color and form that can exist only within the parameters of the artist's canvas.

In Watteau's figure drawings, which spring directly out of his apprehension of nature, one feels a commitment to palpable reality as urgent as Rembrandt's; the passion for reality and the startling truthfulness of the drawings, among the greatest ever done, mark Watteau's deep debt to the art of the north, of Flanders and Holland. The central achievement of Watteau's art is best understood by considering the process by which these drawings grow into paintings. As the images from the drawings are absorbed in the paintings, they no longer seem like magical little mirrors of reality. With Watteau, picture structure is discovered within the structure of the real world, but the relation between one and the other is not fixed or enforced. Watteau paints in opposition to both the Flemish idea of painting as mimesis and the Renaissance idea of painting as an act of creating logical, ideal spaces. For Watteau, the essential operation is an intuition of compositional structure grounded in observation, instinct, and experiment. Looking at *Gersaint's Shopsign,* one witnesses an artist who operates without a guiding principle of composition: with Watteau, composition is revealed through the searching strokes of the brush. I am reminded of Braque's remark, made very late in his life, that painting is like reading tea leaves. In *Gersaint's Shopsign,* painting reveals composition.

When one is caught up in Watteau's command of the picture surface—the way he molds it to an expressive purpose—there is only one other artist of the eighteenth century who ever comes to mind: Chardin. *Gersaint's Shopsign* is a painting that I can imagine Chardin having painted. As for the *fêtes galantes,* whose lovers may seem the antithesis of Chardin's earthbound still-life objects and kitchen maids, one feels in them, as in the canvases of Chardin, a determination to see easel paintings as lyric poems. Watteau and Chardin re-invented oil painting. The French Academy went on its way, affording them a measure of acclaim but reserving its places of highest distinction for the exemplars of a dying form of history painting. Chardin's famous address to the Academy, with its memorable description of the difficulties of the painter's vocation as well as his haunting remark that "painting is an island whose shores I have visited," might have come from the mouth of Watteau.

If one goes to the room at the Louvre that contains the small paintings by Watteau and Chardin, one realizes how the weight that these two artists gave to the tiniest picture suggests the movement from a public to a private idea of art. After seeing the Watteau retrospective in Washington I found it a bit of a surprise to look in the catalogue at the dimensions of some of the paintings: they contain so much within so small a compass. *The Pleasures of the Dance,* in which most of the more than fifty figures seem fully dimensional personalities, is a mere twenty-one by twenty-six inches. *The Shepherds,* as complete as many an eight-foot canvas by Rubens, is only twenty-two by thirty-two inches. The smallest of the greatest Watteaus, *Finette,* of a young girl playing a large stringed instrument, is ten by seven inches! In Aristotle's *Poetics,* where the philosopher sets out so many of the canonical ideas of form in Western art, there is a passage concerning excessive smallness.

> Beauty is a matter of size and order. An extraordinarily small animal would not be beautiful, nor an extraordinarily large one. Our view of the first is confused because it occupies only an all but imperceptible time, while we cannot view the second all at once, so that the unity of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> the whole would escape us, if, for example, it were a thousand miles long. It follows that, as bodies and animals must have a size that can easily be perceived as a whole, so plots must have a length which can easily be remembered.

In Aristotle's terms most of Watteau's paintings would seem ugly, for they pack too much into too small a space. But part of the piquancy of Watteau's pictures results from the way all those bits of delicacy—in paint stroke, in human gesture—are packed in. The way that the images do not get room to expand, ugly for Aristotle, becomes poetic for us. In Vermeer, the small compass of the painting is a reducing mirror of the larger world and expands in the mind. In Watteau's *Finette* the smallness of the girl's head and hands, like the smallness of the picture, does not strike one as a scaled-down version of the real world—it analogizes nothing. In a way completely new in Western art the viewer is brought close to the charged veil of paint strokes: painting as paint.

With Watteau, painting, marvelously, goes to pieces and fragments. Watteau's color tends to emphasize slivers and bits, surprising gleams that flare up, unexpectedly, anarchically, all over the canvas. The idea of figure composition in Watteau, like the idea of picture size, is anti-classical. With Rubens, figure composition was always a matter of painted sculpture groups, of volumes, complete in action and outline, occupying space. In Watteau not the whole figure arrests one but the parts of the figure. Watteau's hands —perhaps the most extraordinary hands in Western art—sometimes feel like autonomous objects for contemplation. They flex, turn, expand, contract in little musical arrangements of reaching-out-toward and pulling-back-from, expressing everything from lust, to indifference, to thoughtfulness. One's eyes move through Watteau's paintings, adding up sensations. The paintings are never dull; they fill one up and leave one hungering for more. The experience is something like stringing beads, one by one, on a cord with no knot at the end, so that they keep slipping off. This perpetual coming into focus brings to mind the spirit of Braque's silvery analytic Cubist paintings and of his late, dark Studio pictures. I also see Watteau dimly reflected in the skeins of Giacometti's paintings, which are incomplete in ways Watteau's are not, but which have, sometimes, in the tenderness of a face or the sharp observation of an object, an echo of Watteau's supreme ability to bring things, seemingly at will, out of and back into focus.

When it came time for me to leave the Watteau retrospective I felt torn, saddened in a way I do not recall often feeling on leaving an exhibition. Turning for a last time away from *Gersaint's Shopsign* reminded me of the feeling I had a few years ago on saying goodbye to Bernini's *Saint Theresa in Ecstasy* in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome—a feeling more like leaving a person than a work of art. Perhaps in the way that human need creates psychological spaces that can only be filled by other people, something about these works leaves a psychological or emotional space for the viewer to fill. These works of art are rock hard, but also extremely porous.

Exploring the Watteau show can make one feel like a somnambulist. The compositions appear, at first, unemphatic, so that one finds oneself lost in the middle of a painting without exactly knowing how one got there. Watteau's clumps and screens of trees—insubstantial, but never feathery in the way of Fragonard's trees—resolve into surprising configurations (a horseshoe, a keyhole) or disintegrate into space. One drifts, lingers, caught up by a curiosity that keeps pulling one off balance. One can go to this show sure of Watteau's greatness and leave surprised by his extent. He breaks molds of his own making.

How depressing, then, that there is anything to be said against this magnificent exhibition. Everything must have been going just fine until the design department at the National Gallery got into the act. They did well by the drawings, but gave the three rooms of paintings a treatment that seems to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ask Watteau. "Can you look good in rooms like this?" The galleries are very underlit, and are painted dark gray-green, dark gray-blue, and dark gray-plum; the floor is dull gray-mauve and the ceiling is light gray. From what I understand of eighteenth-century design, it put a value on lightness and airiness, so there can be no historical rationale for these colors: pale green or cream is more in line with period taste. What these deep, drab, light-absorbent colors do is make the walls dominate over the pictures and give the rooms the kind of enforced coherence that is what interior decoration, as a business, is all about.

The day I was at the show a television crew was filming, and as they turned their powerful lights on painting after painting I began to understand how sinister the general murk of this painting installation really was. *The Pilgrimage to the Island of Cythera* (of which the show contains the second, more focused version) had been puzzling me a bit: the individual forms seemed rather separate, as if cut off from one another. It was only with the help of the television lights that I could see the great, translucent screens of tinted oil that Watteau had flung across the surface to summon up one of his marvelous atmospheres, soft and clear as the best day in spring. Under a more reasonable amount of light *Gersaint's Shopsign* displayed new depths. For instance, a *tricornaire* that had seemed black was now revealed as a composite of many, subtle grays. In general, the more light there was on the paintings the more spacious and equivocal—the more Watteau-esque—they became. As I saw secret spaces revealed under the lights in painting after painting, I realized that the darkening of the rooms, which has the effect of flattening the paintings, is, in terms of aesthetics, a political act. What is happening is that a voguish idea of painting as flat (which has perhaps as little to do with the planarity of Picasso or Mondrian as it has to do with Watteau) is being imposed on these pictures. The dark walls and dark lighting reduce the gentle flowing in and out of space that is at the heart of Watteau's magic.

Thank goodness, despite the walls and lights, Watteau can make his effect. These are paintings that could cast their spell anywhere, in an airplane hangar or a subway station. Their imperviousness to surroundings reminds one of those great, heroic nightclub singers. The club is crowded, noisy with the comings and goings of waiters, smoke-filled. The singer comes out to applause and introduces herself. There are a few bars of music, she begins, and the simple story of a little evening, a man, a good time that she knew would end, or a troubled love that she wanted to keep, penetrates the room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Millet in Boston

by Dan Hofstadter

The sibylline city of Boston has had many points to make over the years. One of the less urgent but more interesting she has made of late concerns the French painter Jean-François Millet. Millet has hardly been forgotten, but for a man of his talents he has—according to Boston—been rather neglected. This pains the old dame because ever since her most eloquent reforming days in the last century she's had a crush on the French painter, who was as refined and as democratic as herself. This year—in a somewhat possessive, matronish way—the Boston Museum of Fine Arts has decided to rectify this lamentable situation with a big exhibition in its new Gund Gallery. The show, organized by Alexandra R. Murphy, curator of European painting, offers pictures from every period of Millet's career, including many paintings, prints, and drawings originally collected by those notable Bostonians who were among the first to admire the "peasant painter of Barbizon."[1]

In the middle of the last century, Barbizon (whose curious, tonsorial-sounding name is now borne by hotels and health salons, modeling agencies and foundation garments) was still an all-but-unknown village just outside the Forest of Fontainebleau on the Chailly plain. Through this village ran a cobblestoned street lined with one-story thatched cottages overgrown with lichens and moss. There was no market (you went marketing in Chailly) and few of the cottages had wooden floors. On three sides the wheatfields stretched away, but on the west side, if you had a mind to hunt for mushrooms, or to put your cows to pasture in the glades, you could walk through a gate in a high stone wall into the dark, lonely, enchanted-looking forest. It was to this hamlet and its little artists' colony that Jean-François Millet moved in 1849.

The most important thing about Millet was his attachment to the land and the people on it. He came from Gruchy in Normandy, a village on the Cotentin peninsula between Cherbourg and La Hague, and was just what the French like to think of as a "typical" Norman: fair-skinned, handsome, reserved, good at farming and the use of farm tools. He also held his tongue, keeping interminable silences in what is supposed to be the Norman way; and he hoped for silence from others and from the world at large.

Edward Wheelwright, a Bostonian painter who came to Barbizon to learn from Millet, wrote what seems to me by far and away the

1 "Jean-François Millet: Seeds of Impressionism" ran from March 28 through July 1 at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. A comprehensive, well-researched catalogue, with sixty-three colorplate and one hundred thirty-five black-and-white illustrations, accompanied the exhibition ($24.95). In her catalogue essay, Miss Murphy writes of Millet's pictures in a likably plain style, well suited to her subject, and her commentaries provide the reader with just the right amount of information.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

best biographical sketch of the artist, for the *Atlantic Monthly* of September, 1876. He found "a large, strong, deep-chested man, with a full black beard [and] a gray eye that looks you through and through." Noting Millet's aversion to talk, he marveled all the same at his "propriety of language . . . remarkable in one born a peasant." And in fact the Millet family cottage was upholstered in books, with the Bible and Theocritus's *Idylls* and Virgil's *Georgics* ever near at hand. One of the painter's favorite quotations was from a French translation of *Paradise Lost:* "Le silence écoute"—the silence listens. "What a silence that must be!" he would exclaim. "A silence that hushes itself to listen, a silence more silent than silence itself!"

He'd started out as a portrait painter at Cherbourg, where he'd ruined his reputation with a bad likeness, executed after a death mask, of a recently deceased local bigwig. The task must have been impossible, and actually Millet's other portraits—especially those of his first wife, of the toothless Grandmère Romany in her Cotentin bonnet, and of himself—are superb. In his self-portrait his moustache almost obscures his mouth, so that his piercing eyes stare at you unnervingly without his giving away anything of himself. When you draw near, though, the mouth suddenly materializes, very different from what you might have expected, a pure if shadowed vessel of emotion.

After twelve years of destitution, painting potboilers and shop signs in Normandy and Paris, Millet moved to Barbizon, ready to tackle the painting of country life. Partly this meant rural genre painting, partly the *paysage moralisé* or figure-in-a-landscape with moral overtones: faggot-gatherers in the forest, gleaners in the field. Yet his treatment of the Northern French countryside and its folk reveals how much he retained of the Romantic outlook.

To any visitor this landscape would seem pretty strongly articulated. Imagine for a moment that you were a model maker and had to find miniature equivalents for the basic materials of a Norman village or a hamlet in the Île-de-France. You'd have to discover little things with the look and feel of granite masonry and hand-hewn timber, of thatch and ardoise tile, of quickset hedges and apple trees and—if your models were historical—of homespun woolens and sabots. Most textures would be rough and many would be grooved or ribbed; others would be speckled aggregates of colored particles. Often the figurines you'd use for the human body would have to be partly reshaped to resemble the tools they were wielding: the mower's trunk in a torque like the twist of the scythe-shaft. I think it's fair to say that most realist painters representing these surroundings would try to create just such equivalents with their brushwork. But Millet didn't exactly do this, for he didn't so much mirror reality as poetically re-invent it. Though competent at rendering the staccato quality of the rustic scene, he was also fond of grand simple outlines and a sort of sweet modeling around the human form (as opposed to a planar or "carved" appearance). Théophile Gautier, who in his art criticism defended Millet against his many detractors, perceptively likened his figures to those of Andrea del Sarto. And actually there is something "high style" in his suaver pictures: they're less like country pâté than pâté de foie gras, as smooth and brown in their gilded frames as goose liver in a crust. The fields and trees are hazily suggested and the figures have soft edges and their clothes are rarely filthy or rent or creased or even treated in blocky planes. Often the people are alone, one to a picture, where they might as well keep a rich silence since there's no one to talk to.

Consider the *Seated Spinner* of 1854. This tiny, ten-inch picture is like a peep into a dollhouse, the spinner herself a doll in wondrously faded muslin and wool. She swims in atmosphere; the only hard edge you can make out is in her Norman bonnet. Her room is tidy, her costume immaculate; no one is carping at her. She seems scarcely to touch her wheel, for the hand turning the crank is blocked from view while the one that feeds the fiber is not clearly joined by so much as a thread to the distaff. This hand,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though serviceably modeled, is too indistinct to be a focus of the picture; and if you make a study of those of Millet's hands that grasp tools you find that he rarely cares to draw them with much distinction or force. He's too reserved for such a display; there's a willed softness, a tameness in his vision. Not especially picturesque, not really sentimental, the seated spinner still has about her an air of peasant gentility. Millet is called "the peasant painter," but his kinfolk were not so much peasants as self-sufficient yeomen, and to the degree that he painted a reverie of his Norman childhood he favored a certain modest comeliness of dress and bearing for his figures. The Boston show reminds us of how subtly he blended the sculpturesque with the coarse-grained and the clumsy.

The curatorial enterprise in Boston made a point of Millet's neglected historical role. It also made a good deal of his boldness, of his skill with color, of his prefiguring of Impressionism: in fact the show bore the subtitle "Seeds of Impressionism," which was happily omitted from the catalogue. I suppose that if people want to see the whole course of modern art history as flowing through the sluice of Impressionism then Millet too might as well be considered a forerunner, though the Impressionists retained precious little of his manner. He colored delicately but he was not really a colorist, for he applied his little reticent touches to a bituminous ground and did not fashion his pictures out of pure hues as Pissarro would do. This method has more in common with the seventeenth century than with Impressionism, just as Millet's imagery is in some ways quite conventional, owing much to Le Nain and Chardin. Of all the pictures in the current exhibition only a few are truly proto-Impressionist, such as *Training Grape Vines* (ca. 1864), which seems painted with the very wind and whose white-blossoming fruit tree in the middle distance resolves on close inspection into something like a mass of adorable Sisleyesque thistledown. Millet's supposed boldness seems an amiable exaggeration, perhaps dating back to when his images of sharecroppers still seemed to imply the threat of agrarian revolution. But he was not bold so much as shy-and-strong, which is not the same thing. Resourcefully at home before a small canvas, he flopped at larger efforts, worrying a sleeve or a skirt with fussbudgety color while the rest of the picture went unsolved; and his compositions, though poignantly personal, are often derived from the old masters or portal sculpture.

Today one wonders how this irreproachable papa of nine, puttering about in his studio barn or his vegetable garden, could ever have put the fear of the devil—the fear of Jacques Bonhomme rather—into the landed gentry, or how his notorious Sower could ever have been imagined forcing the manor door. Millet wasn't even a socialist; the closest he ever came to revolution was in shouldering (like plenty of wishy-washy types) a guardsman's rifle during the June Insurrection of 1848. Not really threatening in his own time, Millet has come to seem folksy and harmless; with his kids and animals and sunsets and farmhouses he is quintessentially the "popular painter," a fact to which the throngs of Boston and Cambridge burghers at the Fine Arts exhibition bore lively witness. One recalls that George Sand, whose rural fiction intrigued and disappointed Millet, considered herself a "communist," though she never wielded anything more lethal than a lighted cigar. Actually Millet, many of whose twilight scenes are quite sentimental (a point he would have refused to concede), had much in common with the Good Lady of Nohant; his peasants are far closer to hers ("slow and steady work habits, some vestige of piety without bigotry," etc.) than to Zola's for example. Millet did not on the whole portray the tumult and squalor of agricultural labor-gangs on big estates but rather the settled ways of the small proprietor. His rustics—not individually but as a whole—are figures of the romantic imagination, symbols of the human plight as well as representatives of the peasantry. Fundamentally conservative in execution, celebrating a social class already on its way out, Millet's art, like Sand's, falls

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somewhere between the bucolic and the realistic. Would it really be too unsympathetic, when all is said and done, to half-suspect that like hers it falls into an encroaching oblivion? Well, Boston thinks otherwise; and whatever Boston thinks the rest of us must rethink.

There is a touching continuity in Boston's spirited defense of Millet. It started in the 1850s, long before the Parisians had begun to collect him seriously, and was partly inspired by a surprising moral commonality, the same that led Margaret Fuller to seek out George Sand. Both the Barbizon painters and the Transcendentalists admired the plainer sort of natural beauty, and like the then popular Abbé La Mennais the Boston reformers appealed for a new social order on the grounds of Christian decency rather than pseudo-scientific theories. In a prefatory essay to the exhibition catalogue on the Boston collectors of Millet, Susan Fleming quotes Emerson's "Who would dare claim that a potato is inferior to a pomegranate?" and notes that the painter of the *Potato Planters,* who once insisted that "sowing potatoes [is no] less noble . . . than any other action," read Emerson in translation. The three men who did most to bring Millet's pictures to Boston were the artists William Perkins Babcock and William Morris Hunt, and the industrialist Quincy Adams Shaw. In time the collecting of Millet became a reflex in New England and elsewhere in America, and the Boston Museum's holdings of Millet are rivaled only by the Louvre's. It was these holdings (which were supplemented by a number of pictures on loan) that formed the core of the present show.

About a hundred and fifty works, including drawings, pastels, and etchings as well as oils, were hung in the Museum's new west wing. Fortunately the arrangement was roughly chronological rather than thematic; there were enough shepherdesses and spinning/knitting/sewing pictures here to decorate all the best parlors on Beacon Hill. The result was successful entertainment, which went more than half-way to proving Boston's point.

Part of that point is that Millet was a great draughtsman, and the drawings were interspersed amid the paintings in a nice old-fashioned way. Still, the claim is disconcerting, for his drawings often have a fractured, rough-and-ready look that is far from obvious virtuosity or the relative finish of his paintings. Time and again, though, one is obliged to concede that these drawings are every bit as good in their way as Ingres's or Degas's. Their way is to tenderly define the unconscious meaning of the pose at the expense of any blandishments of shading or detail. Hence the figure must be given in entirety like a little melody, for only so can the telltale gesture—a curve of the spine, a twist of the neck—be shown to govern the whole person and to convey his or her momentary preoccupation. Neither sinuous line nor voluptuous volume will do this, but only accuracy of direction, of angle; and accordingly all the angles in a Millet figure drawing are minutely studied, though registered with the appearance of speed. Fine examples are the now cut or torn sheets of studies for the masterpiece, *Harvesters Resting.* This picture, full of the sort of Biblical allusions that were to make Millet acceptable to proper Bostonians (twelve harvesters eating beside a haystack; three up-ended ladders; a farmer [Boaz] welcoming a gleaner [Ruth]) is also one of the few that depict peasants as slobs, with table manners, or haystack manners, that would make the bourgeois gorge rise. A sketch for the man sitting in the foreground, in black conté (Millet's usual drawing medium) on blue-gray laid paper, discloses such receptive power, such almost painful sensitivity to the nuances of bodily exhaustion, that one is tempted to guess at some sort of rare visual hyperesthesia in its author (who in fact suffered from severe migraines, possibly brought on by working at dusk, a time he preferred). Few of the lines intersect or even touch, as if any such resolution, any such closing of the net, would entrap the poor draughtsman in the toils of overconfidence;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and as the page is swiveled around counterclockwise the same hunched harvester reappears twice in broken outlines as his rawhide suspenders gradually slip from his back and his bare feet draw together, perhaps to soothe each other with a rub.

It has long been held that Millet didn't etch as well as he drew, a contention the Boston exhibition tried to refute by juxtaposing a good many etchings to supposed advantage with the paintings and drawings. Here, though, I'm afraid that most people would side with the older opinion. It's not merely that Millet loses spontaneity when he repeats his designs in copper, or that his darker shadows often plug up; it's that the very meaning of the pose usually slips through his fingers. Millet drew as you would coax an animal, with little gestures that were probably challenging to make the first time around but boring to repeat. Compare the etching called *Shepherdess Knitting* with the conté drawing for it. The etching loses the droop of the girl's bonnet and the reflected light on her face, spoils the knitting movement of her fingers and the sun-dapple on her mantel, and attends too little to the distant sheepfold. Most important of all, it misses the gesture of the feet, and that in a way is its only service, for in so doing it draws attention to the perfection of the feet in the conté version. In both pictures the little shepherdess leans against a grassy embankment with her weight on one foot and the other tucked behind it. This modest stance, charmingly captured by Millet in his drawing, entails bending the free foot sideways; and it is just this cocking of the foot that has disappeared in the etching, where the girl steadies herself in a mechanically difficult position, with both soles down.

Millet breathed life into a drawing just by his treatment of the feet. Not that he couldn't "do" hands; his hands are the rough-and-ready approximations that most artists employ. But his feet are small miracles: here a woman sits mending in a garden, her feet turned outward with heels touching, demure as can be; here a harvester lies flopped over a sheaf of wheat, his sabots kicked off, his right toes poking the grain dust from between his left; here a lithe gamine in apron and bonnet cranes around birdwise, almost on one foot, to get a glimpse of her little brother's penis about to emit its amber stream. And so it goes, in picture after picture, a wry, affectionate, ever-lengthening ode to the nether extremity.

Millet's way with feet furnishes a clue to his curious and melancholy character. We wonder, for instance, why he so utterly shunned the lure of success in Paris for poverty in Barbizon. And was it his drift toward the inarticulate that caused him to prefer isolated peasants to peasants working in groups, or the puzzlements of nightfall, a time often shown in his images, to the precisions of day? How did he come to feel such empathy with mute beasts that he could effortlessly catch the look of a goose gadding toward him over a bump in the yard, or the protest in a ewe's eye as her lambkin is kidnapped, or a pig's fierce struggle not to become sausage? Why did he so often portray the lonely, mindless occupations—shepherdess, spinner, sower, plowman—and so seldom the creative, social ones—carpenter, weaver, cartwright, smith? Why does nobody in his very manual world ever seem very "handy"? Why, in the end, as Edward Wheelwright put it, did he turn so "instinctively"—and, we might add, so exclusively—"toward the pathetic aspects of human life?" For Millet the feet were the perfect emblem and embodiment of passive toil—dumb, weary, suffering, unable to create like the hands but also earth-near, sustaining, obedient, redemptive. They are the drudges, the bearers, the pawns, the peasantry of the body. Reared upon and much influenced (as I gather) by the old picture-Bibles, Millet seems to have visited on himself a Job-like sense of affliction unhappily compounded by his crushing migraines and huge debts. The joyous side of life, he once owned to a friend,

> never shows itself to me; I know not if it exists, but I have never seen it. The gayest thing I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know is the calm, the silence, which are so delicious, both in the forest and in the cultivated fields . . . . You will confess that it always gives you a very dreamy sensation, and that the dream is a sad one, although often very delicious.

You are sitting under a tree, enjoying all the comfort and quiet which is possible to find in this life, when suddenly you see a poor creature loaded with a heavy faggot coming up the narrow path opposite. The unexpected and always striking way in which this figure appears before your eyes reminds you instantly of the sad fate of humanity—weariness . . . .

In cultivated land sometimes—as in places where the ground is barren—you see figures digging and hoeing. From time to time, one raises himself and straightens his back, . . . wiping his forehead with the back of his hand —"Thou shalt eat bread in the sweat of thy brow."

Is this the gay and playful kind of work that some people would have us believe? Nevertheless, for me it is true humanity and great poetry.

I must stop, or I shall end by trying you. You must forgive me. I am all alone, and have no one with whom I can share my impressions. I have let myself go, without thinking what I was saying. I will not start this subject again.

On reading this well-known statement I felt impelled to look up Millet's correspondence and find out whether he was really the melancholic I'd conceived him to be after seeing the Boston pictures. It turned out that the letters *to* him, as well as the photos of him and the memoirs about him, were more revealing than his own communications, a number of which are printed for the first time in translation in Miss Murphy's book and most of which have to do with money and migraines. A photo of 1854 shows him with his family piled on top of him like puppies in a litter; he stares morosely out, mindful no doubt that *something*'s got to be wrong with *somebody* in this heap of humanity. The scene suggests what we might suspect anyway from the volume of his progeniture and production—that he used his melancholy as a shield for a certain inner buoyancy. And are we surprised to learn (from his printer, Philippe Burty) that this man who apologized for sharing with a friend some perfectly respectable feelings was impeded in his speech by a mild stammer? Or that this artist, whose work largely depicts female employments (spinning, knitting, sewing, shearing, gleaning, faggot-gathering, laundering, churning, sheep- and cow-herding, and domestic instruction), was fondest of the women in his family, starting with his maternal grandmother? Don't we feel a shock of recognition when we observe that Millet in his glooms was vibrating sympathetically to the despondency of his grandmother, his mother, and his sister, whose deaths within a short span of time threw him into the deepest despair and guilt? How similar in tone to his own words are the following ones written to him by his mother: "I cannot either live or die content, so great is my longing to see you. Here times are hard, and life is sad for us all. The wind has parched the ground, and we do not know what to do with the animals. They are dying of hunger. The corn is bad and the price of wheat seven francs a bushel. And the taxes must be paid and all the household expenses."

As it happened, Millet's grandmother and mother died without him, rekindling inside him a spirit of self-reproach that had probably begun much earlier when he'd left the Gruchy farm. It was this self-reproach, we may surmise, that led him to charge his personal landscape with such intense moral energy. Turned inside out, his remorse became the greatest provocation of his art, namely that the pastoral or bumpkin genre (traditionally a low-style affair) could be transformed into a sort of stricture. This overturning of the moral order inherent in the old genres coincided with an aesthetic combination bordering on paradox, namely the idealization or at least the monumentalization of weariness, the one bodily state that almost refuses such treatment and is never so treated in classic art except in the theme of the mocking of Christ. That Millet so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brilliantly pulled it off must have infuriated contemporary conservatives, but it also nettles me, though for different reasons. One of the Barbizon painters once remarked to Edward Wheelwright that a certain picture of Millet's was straight from the Bible, and though the prophetically bearded Millet did "look as though he'd been taken bodily out of it," he was not so much a prophet as a nag. There's a maddening diligence to his painting, which with its many repetitive touches can seem a chore about chores. I say maddening because it makes you feel idle *(Fie on you, just standing there looking at me!)* but also because, in its domesticity, it's so strong: "force well-ordered, well-directed, calm, without bustle or excitement, not to be diverted from its aim" is how Wheelwright remembered Millet's way of working, summing up the superior efficiency of the tame animal, the boy who's learned from his ma. With similar industry, his peasants also put us to shame: in taming their land and their livestock they are also tamed by them, and unlike the more restless social classes are "not to be diverted" from their aim. The only thing that will stop them is sheer exhaustion, at which point they turn into worn-out statues tinged with rose by the setting sun.

Of course, the French peasant woman wasn't really any longer as Millet portrayed her: for one thing, France already had a mechanized textile industry in his day, and the handiwork he depicted was rapidly turning into a memory. In a way his art was mostly memory, a translation into image (as his friend and biographer Alfred Sensier wrote) of his Norman farm youth: Millet never painted from nature. His most haunting childhood recollection was that of awakening to the sound of the women working in the next room, the carders and the spinners of wool, whose whirring wheels made a noise like the intermittent snoring of sleepers. One of the things painting can do is to recapture bygone days; it can be like one of those dreams of your childhood house, familiar and yet not, with rooms that go on forever, remembered and yet not. For Millet, these rooms were full of silent women plying their wheels, and it was the female spirit that he always loved and that led him into the secure province of the past. Likewise, the "female" symbols held him: the feet, the land, the peasants, the fall of night. His early departure from Normandy and its beloved women had marked an exile from childhood, and he was to paint many versions of that exile, that Fall: Adam and Eve going out to work, the Hebrews led into captivity, and other, more attenuated variations.

But always in his pictures you come back to the silence. Nowhere do you hear the raucous cries that often seem to fill the views of other rural painters, such as his predecessor Léopold Robert or his contemporary Jules Breton. With Millet, all is hushed; at the most you can just make out, through the sighing of the wind, the distant cantilena of the field hands. "That place," he once wrote in a daydream about his Norman village, "was filled with such calm solitude that the honk of a goose or the cackle of a hen assumed an immense importance." At peace with the female side of his nature, Millet drew modestly but sedulously on its power to re-create that calm solitude. In so doing, he imbued his art with what he most wanted—the silence that listens.

Reflecting anew on Millet's achievement, one is inclined to think as Boston does: his mastery still casts its rather glum spell. What the Boston presentation sometimes tended to overstress, however, was Millet's adventurousness. He never really cut loose: never quite abandoned the devotional and the sculpturesque for the raw-boned and the loose-jointed. His vision remained that of a Romantic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sackets Harbor, 1866"
by Herbert Morris

Here, let me take your things. How cold your hands are;
the rest of you, I daresay, must be frozen.
I've built a fire to last as long as we last,
and I forewarn you there is talk in me
to last the afternoon and into evening.
Poppa's room has a fine view of the lake.
It's to the front, at the head of the stairs,
while mine is to the rear, facing the marshes.
Perhaps I failed to show it to you last time.
We can go up to see it if you like,
but I've put on a pot of tea to brew.
I thought we'd warm to that on such a cold day.
We can see the house later, and the view:
"all the way to Canada and beyond,"
the boy who cuts the trees for Poppa calls it.
How good of you to come, and in such weather.
Winter can be quite harsh here, but I must say
I mind the weather much less than I once did,
oh, not nearly as much, and I am thankful.
Nothing, when I was younger, kept me warm,
not the coat with the mouton sleeves and collar,
not the long scarf, not sweater worn on sweater,
not even, nights, the goosedown cover, nothing.
Poppa says the cold is our element.
Attitude, he says, is what keeps us warm
(or fails, he might have said, to keep us warm).
It may be I no longer dwell on it,
the cold, that is. It seems part of the days here,
part of the life we live here at the lake.
(Of course, this is no ordinary lake;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the boy who cuts the trees calls it a sea,
which I suppose is apt. Look at the map:
does Lake Ontario look like a lake,
or does it seem forces have worked their way,
glacier, or salt, perhaps a form of anguish,
so far inland it seems we come to cling
to the edge of something quite oceanic?).
Now I offer it no resistance, none,
and no longer do I do battle with it.
It could be said I hope for less, as well.
The boy who cuts the trees says hope may be
one's resistance to the inevitable.
I think that says it fittingly, don't you?

The day that Mr. Lincoln died, I thought
nothing in our lives would be quite the same,
nothing could be restored to what it was.
But the peaches were as immense that summer
as the previous summer; pears and apples
ripened the week they ripen every autumn,
and the lake froze the eighteenth of November
as it has each year since I was a child.
Letters from Owen still come once each month,
just as they did before, giving the news,
the very same news, ship, ship's crew, the weather.
And Owen is still wed to the Charles Cooper,
the envelopes are still marked Mexico,
the Falklands, San Francisco, Patagonia.
Mr. Lincoln's death did not change that, either,
and, I daresay, I expect nothing will.

On the coldest days, how can I explain it,
when I set out early for Watertown,
follow the path that cuts through tall grass (I can
take you there later, too, after our tea),
the lake frozen as far as you can see,
even perhaps beyond where you can see,
a gale whipping up from the shore, the wind
hammering from all sides, thirty-foot waves
slamming across the rocks, the jetties shattered,
I feel warmed by that chaos, safe, protected,
as Poppa would say: in my element.
At the center of where I walk, or stand,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wind drops, and the waves, almost in mid-air,
seem suspended an instant; where the grass
flattens on either side, making a path,
there was no path before, merely wild grass.
It will become quite still, yet I can hear,
as though it lay at some great distance from me,
the fury I have come through and must go through
if I am to make it to Watertown
and back by the time darkness will have fallen.

This is a lithograph of Owen's ship,
all one hundred and sixty-five feet of it.
If you squint, you can just make out the name
painted on the prow, see here?, the Charles Cooper.
The letters are retouched after each voyage
(salt, wind, and light eat clear through the hull's wood),
twenty-two carat gold leaf, Owen tells me,
though when he wrote that, I wrote in response
it could be merely sixteen carat, tarnished,
and halfway to corrosion, for my part.
Can you imagine men calling it home,
or, what is worse, wanting to call it home?
Oh, it's a handsome vessel, I agree,
riding high in the water, sails unfurled,
the decks teak, the bronze fittings highly polished,
but you must know my thoughts about the sea,
about a man choosing to live his life,
at least the better part of it, at sea.
Owen knows, too, but I can't say it matters
to the slightest degree what I may think.
And so once more this year, as I did last,
on that cold, clear, blue morning in mid-April,
when I wake to the sound of lake-ice breaking
and, later, eyes closed, make a wish on candles
Poppa has arranged on the walnut cake
he will ask Mrs. Foster to bake for me,
thirty-one candles this year, thirty-one,
I will look for a letter from Cape Horn
in Owen's hand (the ship draws coal this time;
this run is the longest run of them all,
from Philadelphia to San Francisco,
as well as the most treacherous, I might add,
rounding the tip of South America),

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in which he sends his birthday greetings to me,
then, in a postscript which it takes from one
April to another for me to phrase
properly, with the right inflection, though
the meaning, year to year, remains the same,
says the present voyage will be his last
or, should he have signed on for one more crossing,
next to last, "Trusting this may please you, Owen."
I know it will not likely happen that way,
but I need, each spring, to invent those words,
invent the circumstance, invent a change
in Owen, in my life, invent my life.
(The boy who cuts the trees claims my inventions
approach a richness quite beyond what Owen
gives, has given, or is able to give me.)

Poppa says I must wait, no matter how long.
Poppa has not the slightest difficulty
advising me what to do with the years.
Once a pledge has been made, nothing can break it,
and Poppa thinks we have an understanding,
Owen and I. I may have thought so once
myself, but I fear I no longer think that.
While I may not know what it is he wants,
I know quite well what Owen does not want.
Poppa, of course, knows that it is to wait
perhaps as well as anyone can know it:
Poppa turns eighty-six this year, and his side,
the men, that is, on his side, live to ninety
(but for his father, who did not reach thirty).
I know what Poppa waits for now, forgive me,
and I know, too, how, when he speaks of Owen,
he can tell me I must wait, never thinking
to ask whether I am able to wait,
or wait longer, if I choose to wait,
have the stomach for waiting, never thinking
to ask what it is I might feel each April,
having survived another winter, having
arrived at spring with a life quite as empty,
as purposeless, as the previous spring;
like a sixteen-year-old, blowing out candles
on a cake Poppa paid someone to bake
(imagine, paid, which shows how far we've come,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or not come, we who have only each other,
little, pitifully little, as that is),
wishing, with eyes closed, what I wished last year,
and wished the year before, that Owen cared;
wishing, as though I thought wishing might do
what, year to year, the waiting has not done.

Poppa tells me I must think of the future.
(Poor Mr. Lincoln: thinking of the future
never quite swayed the bullet from its course
nor kept the drama at Ford's from unfolding).
When he is gone, he says, there will be nothing
in my life but a vacant house to care for,
a view of Lake Ontario to one side
and a view of the marshes to the other.
What he means, I suspect, is that I will have
no one to cook for, no one to bring meals to.
When Poppa says "care for" I think he means
serve, or keep house for. Other definitions
of caring, caring for, may be lost on him,
though, of course, I attach no blame: his childhood
was a difficult one, brought to an end
when his father died and he, as the eldest,
left school to save this house and work these orchards.
Poppa's future was always land and labor.
The boy who cuts the trees speaks of the future
as though it were an avenue extending
from the present, majestic, broad, tree-lined,
carriages passing under the high arches
formed by lindens and sycamores, above us,
light through the leaves striking the horse's flanks,
so that we see how beautiful its coat is,
catching in the ribs of the wheel-spokes, dappling
the faces of the fares who board the coach
at some point down the line, young couples, mostly,
arms linked, holding hands, traveling together
(where will not matter, since they go together).
But he is young, twenty-one next September:
he can make what he chooses of his life;
the future seems both limitless and splendid.
He speaks of settling in the Minnesota
Territories, the earth there black and fertile,
or pushing all the way to California

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where, on the slopes of valleys, he has heard,
rises always struck by the sun, grow grapes
as fine, they claim, as any from Bordeaux.
He need not wait for letters from Cape Horn
which, when they come, will speak of everything,
the ship, the crew, the weather, save ourselves.
He need not listen daily to the tune
Poppa perfects and croons: the future, wait,
time made abstract by Poppa, not here, now.
He need not climb the stairs at night and hear
the small sounds his breath makes in a small bed
in a cold room with a view of the marshes,
sounds the size of the life one is reduced to
in this house, winter, 1866,
on the shore of this lake, in New York State,
Canada on one side, sky on the other,
ice for the portion that may lie between.

Owen describes the wrecks of those square-riggers
caught in the coves and inlets of the Falklands,
abandoned by their crews because of straits
much too treacherous to negotiate
(the tide too early, or too late, the day
too bright, if it was day, the night too dark);
the winds have scrambled vessels on the rocks,
the surf smashes the mainsails, the gales lash
the jibs, the beams, or what is left of them,
and the sun bleaches all that lies beneath it:
teak decks crumble to powder, sails to dust.
A smell half rot, half rust, hangs in the air.
The crews call it the graveyard, and the ships
making the long run past the Horn the ghost fleet.
Owen states no one aboard can foretell
when the Charles Cooper may ground on those shoals,
when the planking beneath them may give way
and the South Atlantic undo them all,
though, in fact, I think he might welcome that.
Owen, I can tell you, likes to be tested,
prefers, it seems, unlikely situations
in which he can be brought to confront danger,
and, ideally, in as God-forsaken
a locale as possible, like the Falklands.
Imagine, winds so fierce, and latitudes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so extreme, nothing grows there, nothing can grow,
an archipelago quite wholly treeless.
Life at the lake is much too peaceful for him.
If there is anything Owen feels love for,
it may be risk, the idea of risk.
The boy who cuts the trees (oh, how unhappy
he would be could he hear me call him that)
says that the single risk worth the name risk
is the thing that passes between two people,
both the thing given and the need to give it,
that the risks Owen takes, at sea, those risks
Owen, through the years, occupies himself with
are the risks of a man with little taste
or talent for a life with others, risks
sought by men who find, in time, there is nothing
they can love, find they are not able to love,
who care too little or care not at all.
For a boy who, I daresay, has not ventured
farther than ten or twelve miles from this lakefront,
I do not know how, at twenty-one years,
he can have learned so much, or felt so keenly.
And yet Owen is a man who has traveled
thousands of miles from home, many times that,
but the weight and substance of what he knows
(I do not mean practical knowledge: rainfall
in remote regions, weather, stars, the tides),
what the man understands, is, indeed, meager.

Forgive me, chattering away so, putting
an undue burden on you, I expect,
with my ramblings, all the while quite forgetting
the cup of tea I promised when you came.
Please do excuse such thoughtlessness. Your visit,
and in such weather, mind you, is a tonic;
it seems I hardly know where to begin
before the hour has passed and you must leave.
And visitors are so infrequent now,
at least until late April, words must keep
until the weather breaks, and when it breaks
my silence of these months seems to break with it.
How grateful I am you could come today.
Perhaps in spring I can return your visit,
but with Poppa to care for, with the trees

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to nurse through winter, and this house to manage,
time, I confess, seems to slip away from me
(and, to be candid with you, my life with it).
There, I have put the pot to brew again.
It will be merely minutes, you must stay.
I know you wish to start before the dark falls,
but I can have the boy who cuts the trees
walk back with you as far as the coach station.
The stage is always late on days like these.
Oh, it will be no trouble, I assure you;
he is more than pleased to do what I ask.
Yes, what a fine idea; it will give you
opportunity to become acquainted.
You can weigh for yourself if what I say
is so, or ascribe it to the mere prattling
of an old maid touched by a boy's attention.
Owen will ask about him in his letters.
I do suppose I write of him a great deal;
still, Owen quite forgets that, but for Poppa,
I have no one to speak with until spring
(when Mr. Lincoln died, whom could I grieve with?),
and, of course, the conversations with Poppa
are lectures on my need to wait for Owen.
Poppa grants he is bright, and a hard worker,
highly ambitious, too, but Poppa tells me
I pay him too much mind, I make him think
he and I are equals, or one day might be.
He is a man who works for you, says Poppa.
I have told Poppa Owen shows less kindness
than the boy does, that his feelings run deeper
than Owen's do (feelings for life, that is;
what he might feel for me I dare not guess).
Owen will be a husband, Poppa says,
which, I must say, is knowledge I am lacking.
It would flatter me if Owen proved jealous,
but I quite doubt my words elicit that.
When I write Owen something the boy says,
Owen will answer, "When is the elopement?"
When I wrote the boy wishes to head west,
into the Minnesota Territories,
Owen answered, "Write me your new address."
And when I wrote the boy said word had come back
of earth there black and fertile, Owen wrote,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Will there be soap enough in Minnesota
to scrub such fine, rich dirt from your four hands?"
Poppa says I must tell the boy that Owen
is to marry me after his last voyage.
"Has he told you when that may be?," I ask.
Tell him now, Poppa says, speak of plans made.
"Plans are precisely what I have not made,
what Owen," I tell Poppa, "will not make."
Poppa says, "You must wait, no matter how long."
"What have I left in me to wait with, Poppa?,"
I ask; "what, in fact, is there left to wait for?"
"Think of the future," Poppa says. "What future
does a twenty year-old boy, a tree-cutter,
offer a woman nearly thirty-one,
a woman who has land with fruit trees on it
the envy of the county and the state?"
"What future does a sailor offer, Poppa,
a man who wants only to be at sea,
who," I say, "when he writes, writes nothing, nothing,
of the two of us, only of the sea,
who, in letters, uses the name Charles Cooper
repeatedly, and with an intimacy
wholly wanting when he addresses me?"
"Poppa, this is who Owen is," I say;
"who Owen is, Poppa, Owen will be."
"When he comes home, when the sea is behind him,
when you marry," Poppa says, "that will change."
"But it is not possible to wait longer,"
I say, "not possible Owen will change."
"That, too, is why you must wait," Poppa tells me,
"because the future will not stand in place
long enough, daughter, for you to predict it.
Nor can you predict what, tomorrow, Owen
will be like; that alone should give you hope."
"The boy who cuts the trees," I say, "claims hope is
one's resistance to the inevitable."
Poppa pauses, then slowly, quite distinctly,
pronounces each word, as though with much effort:
"The boy who cuts the trees is not the future."
As exhausted as Poppa now, perhaps,
not unkindly, yet not severely, I say,
"Damn the future, it is today I want."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Theater

Making something out of nothing

by Mimi Kramer

There is a curious inflationary principle at work on Broadway today that has nothing to do with royalty percentages, union wages, or ticket prices. In the commerce between artist and spectator, a point has been reached where the applause of a Broadway audience is entirely meaningless: they will clap for absolutely anything. They clap when the curtain rises; they clap when a familiar actress makes an entrance without tripping; they clap when a familiar actor hurls three darts and doesn't miss the board. One would almost think that Broadway audiences had become so inured to mediocrity and so desperate to be pleased as to be genuinely grateful for anything at all.

Nowhere are the economic aesthetics of Broadway more clearly seen than in the practice of marketing a show on the strength of its stars. You read in the paper that Jason Robards will be starring as Grandpa Vanderhof in *You Can't Take It With You,* Amanda Plummer as Laura in *The Glass Menagerie,* Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman. The excited terms in which the information is couched, the very notion that it is somehow considered "newsworthy" that Al Pacino has consented to appear in a revival of *American Buffalo* or that Mike Nichols has managed to secure Glenn Close and Jeremy Irons for his production of a new Tom Stoppard play, seem automatically to demand some recognition of accomplishment: "Frank Langella, Jill Clayburgh and Raul Julia in *Design For Living*—what a coup!"

So you toddle along to the production and discover that Raul Julia cannot overcome his accent, that Jill Clayburgh does not understand her lines, and that Frank Langella has no sense of timing but has been told that pace is everything. So you emerge from the theater with the peculiar sensation of having been ritzed: the real star of the show was money. Nothing about the production was as impressive as the budget. And since, at every moment, money seemed to be achieving more than anyone on stage, it was as though in the audience's tumultuous applause at the end of the evening producers and performers were receiving payment in thanks for a feat that took place long before the box-office was even open for admission: the exquisite signing of the contract.

"These are hardly off-Broadway prices," snapped the woman ahead of me when I went to buy a ticket for *Hurlyburly.* "I know," said the woman in the box office, taking her check sympathetically. "But look at my cast," she said and smiled.

David Rabe's new smash-hit comedy about alienated and existential Hollywood brings the themes of Chekov and the rhetorical tactics of *Mad Magazine* into an earnest but anxious alliance. Set in the Hollywood Hills "a little while ago," *Hurlyburly* proposes to rip the mask off the face of the television-industry-as-microcosm-for America, showing us how empty and ultimately inhumane

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are the lives of the people who dwell and work there. The lost heroes of Rabe's play, Eddie and Mickey, are spokesmen for a generation that keeps its dreams in with the dope in damp-resistant canisters because its ideals once got soggy. A couple of casting directors whose split-level, ranch-style house, situated in an ominously impinging press of tropical foliage, is a constant reminder of what a goddamn jungle it is out there, Eddie and Mickey themselves inhabit a world governed by a natural law of sorts: survival of the least actively conscious. Action in this world has become a kind of authorless crime whose primary victims are the women that Eddie and Mickey and their pals share variously with a lordly liberality clearly calculated to reverberate in halls more distant than those of the Promenade Theater. Watching Eddie and Mickey hurt others and watch others hurt still others, one feels that one is being asked to join Eddie—in the play's penultimate moments—in weeping for some cosmic loss of sorrow.

Hurlyburly is a play that packages its own inadequacies as a statement about contemporary life. "It's such a weird thing society asks of men," remarks David Rabe in a recent *New York Times* interview, and truly, his play seems to share this conclusion. "It asks them to go into a domestic thing and yet it nurtures this other thing . . . ." I think a lot of people are mistaken about David Rabe, thinking that he has an unusual gift for capturing the voice of Inarticulate Man. I think he's probably just an inarticulate man. Throughout *Hurlyburly,* Rabe seems to want to draw our attention to something—but to what? His authorial hand wanders all over the set, now here, now there, looking for something to point to, getting limper and limper until finally it flops down to fiddle uncertainly with his trousers-knee.

Happily, the directorial hand in *Hurlyburly* is stronger. If there are moments when one thinks one might burst a blood vessel laughing, they are more due to Mike Nichols's comic vision than to Rabe's. Where Rabe has failed to make his characters stand for more than what they are, Nichols almost bails the playwright out. He manages to lampoon a whole generation with a single gesture or an intonation, outfitting in a whole autumn collection of comic imagery characters who would otherwise be clad only in sententiousness. Interestingly, it is precisely the approach to contemporary idiosyncrasy (specifically malicious, generally benign) that Nichols rooted out of the New York production of Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing.* Christopher Walken has a way of drifting unconsciously into a Christ-pose whenever he starts to speak. Sigourney Weaver is given a set of hand gestures that are, if possible, even more hopelessly inarticulate than the character she portrays. In Eddie, the more suffering of the two heroes (played by William Hurt), the Christ-pose would be hackneyed and heavy-handed; since Mickey, the character played by Christopher Walken, spends most of his time on stage being (alternately) pleasantly sardonic and pleasantly comatose, the incongruous gesture is inexpressably funny and seems to offer an ironic comment on how this generation sees itself. And even Sigourney Weaver's hands come through in the end: her gesture during a self-indulgent argument with William Hurt, where she sinks eloquently into an overstuffed sofa and mimes jabbing her fingers down her throat, is positively the last word on meaningful conversation with the coke-generation.

One performance in *Hurlyburly* stands out. Playing Bonnie—a sort of new-class prostitute *cum* stripper—Judith Ivey is staggeringly good. A divorced woman with a child, Bonnie has become a free-style hooker for whom sexual favors are something you do rather than something you share or even sell. Of all Rabe's characters Bonnie seems to be the least unhappy with her lot. The things she does with, to, or for men seem less a business transaction than a happy-go-lucky system of *quid pro quo*; and things she has been known to do in the presence of her little girl cause spasms of indignation even in the morally anaesthetized world of Eddie

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Mickey's pad. But having been treated to violence by Harvey Keitel and to contempt by William Hurt, Judith Ivey makes a speech that almost makes you want to rush out into the street and take up the banner for whoredom.

What Judith Ivey has is the ability to wring from a role or a speech a degree of conviction so compelling (and at the same time so personable) that the voice of her character really does reverberate in halls beyond the theater. In this Judith Ivey may be worth comparing with Glenn Close, whom Mike Nichols cast as Annie in the Broadway production of *The Real Thing*. Glenn Close and Judith Ivey had very similar tasks to perform in their respective roles as Bonnie (the-hooker-with-a-heart-of-Panama-Gold in *Hurlyburly*) and Annie (the heartless second wife in *The Real Thing*). Both characters have a speech toward the end of the play in which they have to try to justify to another character (and to the audience) an apparently irrational or immoral course of action.

In Act III of *Hurlyburly,* having been set up with one of Eddie and Mickey's friends, Bonnie returns to their house bruised and bloodied: Phil, she reports somewhat indignantly, has thrown her out of her own moving car—for no reason at all. Eddie is unperturbed; he gives Bonnie to understand that her indignation is inappropriate, out of place: that in view of the way she makes her living she can hardly expect much else. As performed, the speech Bonnie makes in reply—arguing that her way of life does not lose her the right to be treated as a human being—goes beyond self-defense: it gives us another way of viewing an immoral course of action.

Like Bonnie's speech in *Hurlyburly,* Annie's at the end of *The Real Thing* challenges the presiding morality in the play. The heroine of Stoppard's play has, for some time, been engaging in what amounts to a rather elaborate charade: in campaigning for and publicly defending a young man whose rash political act has landed him in jail, she has been presenting it as an act of moral courage, knowing that it was merely done to impress her. There comes a moment where she has to explain to her husband why for two years she has led the vanguard upon a course which, she now admits, she knew to be false. Standing against the assumption that one does not wittingly espouse a trumped-up cause, Annie's speech offers another morality: that one sometimes does morally questionable things because one feels an irrational moral responsibility for someone.

Actually, Judith Ivey's task was much harder than that of Glenn Close. The whole situation in which Rabe has put Bonnie is an invention as spurious as the putative class of *nouveau tombée* women to which Bonnie is supposed to belong. It is there as an occasion for the speech. Southern California is not full of women whose divorces have left them with no recourse but to become single-parent good-time-girls. But the world *is* full of women who, at one time or another, have found themselves taking an irrational or immoral position because of some sense of guilt or responsibility they feel for having been attractive to someone.

Glenn Close, as Annie, had been with us all evening; as Bonnie, Judith Ivey had been with us less than half that time. And yet how much more fully one felt one understood Bonnie! Judith Ivey had to justify a way of life that few members of the audience could honestly claim to be conversant with; Glenn Close had an element of recognizable truth to work with. Her brief peroration—"What could I do? He was my recruit"—might have been a very moving moment. Tinged with anger, defiance, resignation. shame, or even just self-knowledge, it might have made a certain variety of action suddenly understandable to the audience. As it was, though, Glenn Close sounded as though she were apologizing for having bought the wrong kind of film for the camera: "What could I do? They were out of Ektachrome."

With every reason in the world to move us, Glenn Close failed to do so, while Judith Ivey, creating a character and a sense of morality out of nowhere, did. Because Glenn Close is not an actress and Judith Ivey is.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In fact, what begins to dawn on one, watching Judith Ivey perform, is that she is the only *actor* in the cast of *Hurlyburly (pace* the woman in the box office), the only person with any desire or ability to transform herself and become another person. Which is not, by any means, to say that the other performances are not good: in fact, they are exceptionally good. As Darlene, an empty-headed photo-journalist, Miss Weaver gives the only really poor performance. (Not a good enough actress to play a character less intelligent than herself, she takes refuge in caricature.) But with this exception, the performances in *Hurlyburly* really are superb. One tires of William Hurt long before the evening is over and he and Christopher Walken are still essentially playing themselves, but how much more skillfully they play themselves than usual! It is all a little like watching a master class of great acting students perform an unusually long improvisational exercise under the supervision of an expert teacher.

But most of the written characters of David Rabe's play (such as they are) do not exist even on the stage of the Promenade Theater; there is no Eddie, no Mickey, no Darlene; there are only William Hurt, Christopher Walken and Sigourney Weaver, whose craft consists in dazzling us with their brilliant portrayals of themselves.

Of charisma they have much. But they also have something else. They have in Mike Nichols an extraordinary director: a kind of stage-magician who has an exceptional talent . . . for something—but for what? It is partly a talent for moving people around and creating a semblance of life in action, but it is also a talent for taking inferior material, garbage really, and making it look wonderful.

Rabe's play amounts to very little: it's title, in fact, gives a fairly good indication of the level of thinking behind it. Why should one of the characters in this play describe life in Southern California as "a hurlyburly," after all? Why not a fish tank, a sports car, or a bowling alley? Because he has been dipping into *Macbeth* recently? We never find out. But Nichols, with his genius for taking what are really rather vapid, pretentious things and making them persuasive and credible, sends us away from the theater convinced that a play like *Hurlyburly* has not only meaning but depth. So good is he at what he does that it's a week before we know what hit us—nothing. In this Mike Nichols may be one of the most interesting and affecting forces in theater today.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What are conservatives saying about Sex and God in American Politics?

"I didn't realize that this country's atheists and agnostics had such fragile character that the mere mention of God might cause them grave distress. I am sorry that the country's atheists are such wimps."

-R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

"These 13- and 14-year olds need to be encouraged to keep their knees together until they grow up and find husbands."

-Midge Decter

"I believe that homosexuals should be afforded total civil rights like all other Americans."

-Reverend Jerry Falwell

This summer in

policy REVIEW

Also featuring . . .

Indian War in Nicaragua

6,000 Indian guerrillas are fighting the Sandinistas for their land.

- **Barry Goldwater's Pyrrhic Defeat**
- **How Conservatives Win in Liberal Districts**
- **Will the Libertarian Party Survive 1984?**

policy REVIEW

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 546-4400 2NC4

Yes. I would like to order the summer issue by subscribing at a special introductory rate, 25% off the regular price.

☐ $10.95 for 1 year (4 issues)
☐ $19.95 for 2 years (8 issues)
(Foreign subscribers please add $5.00 per year.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

☐ Check enclosed. (Please make payable to *Policy Review*)
☐ Please bill me. Charge my:
☐ VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ AMEX

CARD NO. _____ EXP. DATE _____

SIGNATURE _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

Vienna in Venice

by Ewa Kuryluk

This May, a large exhibition entitled "Vienna—nell'età della Secessione, 1885-1918" ("Vienna in the age of the Secession, 1885-1918") opened in Venice, at the Palazzo Grassi, which overlooks the Grand Canal.[1] The show was organized by Maurizio Calvesi, the professor of the history of modern art at the University of Rome who is responsible for the visual-arts section of the Venice Biennale. More than a thousand works of art by more than a hundred artists were presented.

The "Secession" in the exhibition's title refers to a movement of young European artists who, in the 1890s, "seceded" from the official, conservative artistic institutions of the time and formed their own, new associations. The first Sezession was founded in Munich in 1892. Its Viennese counterpart began in 1897, when a group of painters, led by Gustav Klimt and supported by the art critic Ludwig Hevesi, separated themselves from the Genossenschaft Bildender Künstler; a year later they moved into their own building, a splendid pavilion designed by the architect Joseph Maria Olbrich. Today the term "Viennese Secession" is used in a broad sense to designate the cultural renaissance that took place in Vienna between 1885 and 1918.

The recent exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi attempted to do many things. For one, it was concerned with giving attention to minor artists—like Richard von Alt, Egger-Lienz, Boecklin—as well as to the great masters of the period, like Klimt and Egon Schiele. For another, it tried to show the unity of Viennese culture and to illustrate—through manuscripts, letters, photographs, and works of art—the exchange of ideas in the fields of architecture and painting, music and literature, psychology and philosophy—in short, in the disciplines whose subjects were once avidly discussed at the marble tables of Vienna's famous coffee houses. Correspondingly, the exhibition stressed the diversity of individual talent: Arnold Schönberg, for example, was presented both as a musician and as a painter, and Kokoschka as a painter, poet, and playwright. The architectural section's display of drawings by Otto Wagner, Camillo Sitte, and Adolf Loos reminded one of how little of their work was actually built. Otto Wagner's extremely modern and beautiful plan for a metropolitan transportation system, for example, went mostly unrealized. (His terminal for the subway in Heiligenstätten, which was built, is unfortunately now completely overshadowed by ugly contemporary construction.)

But the main attraction of the Venice exhibition was a copy of Gustav Klimt's famous Beethoven frieze, a sequence of panels he executed in 1902 for the main hall of the Secession building, where a statue of Beethoven by the German sculptor Max Klinger

1 "Vienna—nell'età della Secessione" opened at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice on May 20. It will be on view until September 16.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was exhibited. The frieze, painted in mixed media on wooden panels, was to have been demolished after the Beethoven show, but at the last moment an Austrian industrialist bought it. Although it is now the property of the Austrian republic, its size and extreme fragility have prevented it from being shown. But for the Secessionist show in Venice a copy was made, faithful to the original size and color. In this way Venice paid special homage to Klimt, whose paintings were first given international attention at the Venice Biennale of 1910.

The frieze represents an important step toward Klimt's mature style, of which the most impressive examples are his portraits of women. These images of rich Viennese ladies, who in their ornamented clothes and decorated rooms look like exotic birds in golden cages, are unthinkable without the influence of the slightly inhuman splendor and crystalline dazzle of Byzantine art. Indeed, it is the mosaic character of Klimt's later paintings that the Beethoven frieze foreshadows, but it also retains the symbolism and ecstatic movement of his earlier work. Its composition is based on showing pairs of opposites: life and death, creation and destruction, hope and despair. It depicts a long procession of men and women, both young and beautiful and old and monstrous. The grotesque figures of opulent old men suggest Klimt's familiarity with the work of Aubrey Beardsley, in particular with Beardsley's cover design for *The Forty Thieves.* Thus, Klimt combined the Byzantine East and the decadent West in one work of art.

Vienna during Klimt's time was a crossroads for many cultures. It was a Mecca for artists from Budapest, Cracow, Prague, and Lemberg, and it played host to several important international exhibitions. The Secessionists, eager to overcome the provincialism of the nineteenth century, brought to Vienna works by Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin, Whistler, and Segantini, as well as paintings by the Polish artists Wyspianski and Malczewski and by the Russian realist Ilya Repin. In the spring of 1900 they organized a large show of Japanese art and in the fall of that year gave over the main hall of their building to representatives of English art nouveau: the sisters Margaret and Frances Macdonald and their husbands, Charles R. Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair. In 1903, they offered an extensive exhibition documenting the development of Impressionism, from its precursors (Tintoretto, Rubens, Vermeer, El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, Delacroix, and Daumier) to Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard, and Bonnard. And it was around this time that these artists began a collection of modern art: one of the first pictures they bought was a Van Gogh landscape, *The Fields Near Auvers-sur-Oise.*

The Secessionists' interest in the modern was well displayed in their magazine, *Ver Sacrum,* one of the most exquisite publications in Europe at the time. Its richly illustrated pages would regularly display furniture, textiles, glass, porcelain, and metal work alongside painting and sculpture. In the Secessionist show in Venice, *Ver Sacrum*'s illustrations of many objects designed and produced by the Wiener Werkstätte, an organization of Viennese craftsmen and designers of this period, could be compared with the objects themselves, which were also on view.

The tenets of the nineteenth century against which the Secessionists directed their dissent are perhaps best represented by Hans Makart, who dominated the artistic life of Vienna—if not the entire German-speaking world—until the Nineties. He was not only a painter but a designer and director of the enormous balls, pageants, and festivals celebrated at the Viennese court and in the streets of the capital. The critic Ludwig Hevesi summed up Makart's over-decorative style best by saying it was aimed at dressing up all of reality. In Makart's paintings, Hevesi wrote, pumpkins look as if they were made of pure gold, sand shines like mother-of-pearl, and forests glitter like grottoes filled with crystals and corals. Even nakedness is rendered in such a way that it acquires the quality of elegant clothing: skin turns into precious stone. Makart wanted to change life into a fairy tale and, as Hevesi

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GERMAN PRINTS 1900–1984

A SELECTED SURVEY

BASELITZ	KANDINSKY	MUNCH
BECKMANN	KIRCHNER	MÜNTER
BEUYS	KLEE	NOLDE
DIX	KOLLWITZ	PALERMO
HECKEL	LÜPERTZ	PENCK
IMMENDORFF	MATARÉ	POLKE

SEPTEMBER 6–29, 1984

GRACE BORGENICHT GALLERY

724 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 10019 212/247-2111

put it, "Vienna into Baghdad," a city of masquerades and festivals, of eroticism and pleasure. Indeed, together with the architects of the Ringstrasse, Makart transformed Vienna into a "metropolis of Kitsch," in Hermann Broch's phrase, and provoked Adolf Loos's famous remark that ornament equals crime.

The language of the Secessionists stresses their "dissent" and their desire for a "renewal" and "holy spring." But from today's perspective we can see more clearly how the traditions of the nineteenth century persisted. The decay depicted by Kokoschka has a decorative quality that makes one think of Makart's dressed up reality. Klimt's Byzantine interiors bring to mind Makart's golden pumpkins, and Schiele's paintings of Viennese suburbs are reminiscent of Makart's crystal-like forests.

Although the Secessionist show in Venice is appealingly diverse, it is incomplete in one important respect: its picture of Vienna is truncated. In the show's catalogue, leading Austrian historians and critics discuss many aspects of the Vienna between 1895 and 1918, but one misses in their essays—and in the exhibition itself—Vienna's "other side," its obscure, semi-scientific, and semi-intellectual underground, where theories of racism, anti-semitism, and nationalism took root. One essay in the catalogue,[2] "Meseria e splendore," by Gabriele Koller, deals with Vienna's overpopulation, and with its Jewish immigration and misery. But more serious matters remain untouched. Nowhere is it mentioned, for instance, that in the city where Freud was engaging in his interpretation of dreams a magazine called *Ostara* was publishing the grotesque racist fantasies of its editor Adolf Lanz. In *Ostara*'s illustrations the conflict of naturalistic and abstract elements—a conflict that makes Klimt's paintings so striking—is perverted into propaganda: a "perfect" blond God is depicted, for instance, in abstract form—as rays of

2 *Le Arti a Vienna* was published by Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia; 589 pages, 30,000 lira (app. $17).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light—while a semitic "marsh demon" is represented naturalistically as a dark ape. *Ostara* may be forgotten today, but "nell'età della Secessione" this cheap brochure was sold in the Austro-Hungarian empire, Germany, and Switzerland in editions of one hundred thousand copies. It would have been interesting to see *Ostara* sitting alongside *Ver Sacrum* in the Venice show.

An exhibition that aspires to present this period in all its complexity should also include the fact that Vienna not only gave birth to an extraordinary culture but also served as the place where the people who were to destroy this culture learned their first lessons. Adolf Hitler, an Austrian from Linz, arrived in the capital in 1907, at the age of eighteen, to study art. When he left six years later for Munich, he was ready to enter politics and change the world. Of course, Hitler was unaware of the Viennese avant-garde; he never went to a salon where a piece by Schönberg was performed. Similarly, the young composer never visited Hitler's milieu of cheap sublets and shelters for the homeless. But the "high" and the "low" of Vienna, even if separate and unconscious of each other, existed side by side. And in the end it was Hitler who triumphed and Schönberg who was exiled.

It is a pity that the catalogue lacks contributions from two Viennese scholars who have devoted their lives to the exploration of Vienna's "other side": the psychologist Wilfried Daim and the historian Friedrich Heer. Daim published a pioneering book on the influence of Lanz's ideology on the ideology of Hitler; Heer traced the roots of Nazism, in part, to Austrian traditions. Their writings would have helped the catalogue convey the feeling of threat and apocalypse that pervaded Viennese culture during the Secessionists' period.

The existence of Vienna's dark underground was intuitively expressed by the older generation of artists. There is a strong apocalyptic element in the early paintings of Klimt, in the plays of the young Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in the early prose and plays of Arthur Schnitzler, and in the music of Gustav Mahler. But it was the younger generation that was to make death and universal destruction the central issue of their art: Georg Trakl's poems proclaim the end of the world; Schiele's paintings depict dead lovers, mothers and children disappearing into the ground; Kokoschka's still lifes and portraits impart a sense of decay, as do the paintings of Richard Gerstl. Kokoschka's play of 1908, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen,* shares in the same spirit, showing the pleasure of sadistic annihilation. And a terrible "other side" is described in Alfred Kubin's grotesque novel *Die andere Seite.* Commenting on the Vienna of this period, the critic Hermann Bahr wrote: "Never had there been a time so full of threat and so obsessed with death. Never had everybody felt so afraid. Never were joy and freedom so distant."

There is one other aspect of the Secessionist exhibition that deserves comment: the fact that it was presented in Venice. This has a special appropriateness. The Austrian Empire was for centuries connected to Venice by many subtle ties. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the expanding Hapsburgs made their first attempt to overthrow the independent Venetian Republic. The coup d'état, plotted by the Spanish line of the Hapsburgs, was prevented by the defection of an officer, an event noted with interest all over Europe at the time since the Hapsburg threat was widespread.

The end of the Venetian Republic came only with the French Revolution. Napoleon conquered the city in May of 1797 and forced the last doge to abdicate. A few days later he handed Venice over to Austria. In the following twenty years the city passed from Austria to France and back again. After the Revolution of 1848, it briefly regained its independence, and after the defeat of the Austrian empire in 1866 by Prussia, it was incorporated into a united Italy. Venice's only physical link to the mainland at this time—its railroad bridge—had been constructed by the Austrians.

Venice has been an enchanted city for all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Europe, perhaps for the whole world. But it played an especially important role in Viennese culture at the turn of the century. It was seen then as a symbol of a fading splendor, the center of an archaic *theatrum mundi,* and a miraculous "inner" city—watery, female, narcissistic, ruled by reflections and masques. Venice was for *fin-de-siècle* Austrians what Petersburg was for the Russians in the nineteenth century: a place where one moved between reality and illusion, life and death, in search of the self.

The Austrian preoccupation with Venice is perhaps best represented in the work of Hofmannsthal. In 1904, for example, he published a play, *Das gerettete Venedig,* based on Thomas Otway's famous tragedy *Venice Preserv'd* (1682). More revealing of the Viennese conception of Venice at this time, however, is an unfinished novel of Hofmannsthal's entitled *Andreas oder die Vereinigten.* Conceived as a Bildungsroman, *Andreas* explores the inner transformation of a young man on his journey from Vienna to Venice—from childhood to adulthood, from convention to individual expression, from confusion to identity and love. In a sequence of hallucinatory encounters with strange women, actors, charlatans, and criminals, the hero of the novel experiences the most extreme and contradictory emotions, seeing himself and others reflectd, doubled, masked. Thus, he discovers the relativity of appearances and outgrows his former "limited Viennese existence."

In such a way Austrian writers and poets created their own Venice—out of memories and fantasies—during the Secessionist period. At the same time, Austrian historians and artists went about absorbing the unsurpassed richness of Venetian architecture, painting, and sculpture. In his *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte,* Max Dvořak traced Tintoretto's popular religiosity through the different Venetian *scuole*; and in 1903 Josef Strzygowski published his *Byzantinische Denkmäler,* which coincided with Klimt's first visit to Ravenna. Klimt considered this journey a turning point in his development from Impressionistic oil painting to the hieratic, glittering, jewel-like compositions, executed in gold and silver, of his later years. One of these compositions, entitled *Judith II* (1909)—generally considered to represent Salomé and to be influenced by Beardsley's illustrations of Oscar Wilde's play—was exhibited at the Venice Biennale of 1910. Later it was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in Venice, which made it available for the Secessionist show at the Palazzo Grassi.[3]

In July of 1913 Georg Trakl traveled to Venice in the company of Adolf Loos. Of this journey Trakl wrote to a friend: "My dear, the world is round. Saturday I will fall down to Venice. And then further down—to the stars." Like Hofmannsthal in *Andreas* or, later, Mann in *Death in Venice,* Trakl saw Venice as a place deep down, a passage into another world. Trakl, who committed suicide a year later, in 1914, was the most intense and compelling prophet of the approaching apocalypse: his visionary poetry expressed not only the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but the end of the whole European world. What he saw already "nell'età della Secessione" others were to see only a quarter of a century later. Arthur Schnitzler wrote in his diary shortly before his death in 1931 a note concerning the people who escape a darkening world "into madness or death." There is a symbolic reminder of Schnitzler's thought on the Venetian lido. There, in the Jewish cemetery, one finds the grave of his daughter Lili (born 1909). She married the Italian fascist Capellini and soon afterward, in July of 1928, killed herself.

---

3 In this connection it is interesting to note that among the Byzantine mosaics of San Marco there is one showing Salomé in a very rare pose: the Jewish princess dances with the head of John the Baptist placed on her head. This way of representing Salomé originated in the East between the tenth and eleventh centuries and reached the West through this very mosaic. The Venetian Salomé, slim and elegant, wears a long blue dress decorated with the feathers of a peacock and looks very much like a *fin-de-siècle* lady. In particular, she brings to mind Klimt's portrait, *Emilia Floge* (1902).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Australian accent?

by Eric Gibson

One of the more interesting recent events on the New York art scene was the "Australian Accent" show at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources (P.S. 1).[1] Although it was partly a showcase for new talent, importing three Australian artists for their first serious American exposure, it was also another example of the recent American interest in Australia's artistic life. (Five Australian artists are included in the Museum of Modern Art's current "International Survey" show, for instance, and this fall the Guggenheim will feature no less than eight artists in their own survey of Australian art.[2]) The aim of the P.S. 1 exhibition was to demonstrate that Australia's creative fecundity, so evident in its recent films and novels, embraces the visual arts as well. And it sought to define, through the work of three artists—Ken Unsworth, Mike Parr, and Immants Tillers—the particular character of Australian art at the moment.

Until the mid-1970s—we are told by John Kaldor in the exhibition's catalogue—Australia was removed from the mainstream of artistic expression. Isolated and distant, it had no museum collections or exhibitions to speak of, and no firsthand contact with contemporary art from abroad. This situation apparently began to ease somewhat when the itineraries of major contemporary artists and of shows from the Museum of Modern Art began to include Australia. Soon after, the Australian National Gallery of Art opened its doors, showing, among other twentieth-century works, Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles.*

Nevertheless, by the time all this had happened—the catalogue continues—the outlook of a generation had been formed. Australia's position outside the mainstream had bred a sensibility characterized by an overwhelming feeling of detachment. And this sensibility, nourished in part by the art and criticism published in international art magazines, favored an approach to art that put ideas at the center and that turned for inspiration to existing examples rather than relying on itself for the spark of an idea.

Now, it may be true that the artists in the "Australian Accent" exhibition mirror, in their detachment, in their propensity for existing imagery, and in the cerebral char-

1 "An Australian Accent" was on view at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources from April 15 to June 10. From there it traveled to the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, where it was on view from June 30 to August 26. The show was organized by John Kaldor, an Hungarian-born textile manufacturer, who now lives in Australia. Mr. Kaldor also published the catalogue, *An Australian Accent*; 87 pages, $14.

2 The Guggenheim show, scheduled to run from September 25 to November 25, will be called "Australian Visions: 1984 Exxon International Exhibition" and will include the work of Peter Booth, Dale Frank, John Nixon, Bill Henson, Susan Norrie, Jan Murray, Mandy Martin, and Vivienne Stark LeWitt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acter of their art, what one might call "the Australian predicament"—the frustration of being sealed off from a dialogue in which one would like to participate and so of being thrown back on one's own resources. But to see their work in this light alone would be to ignore its many other characteristics. More important, the artists in this exhibition were making their debuts in an artistic climate that places a premium on detachment and appropriation. Their predicament, if it is one, is not unique. If much of the art in the P.S. 1 show was uneven, it succeeded most often when the artist rejected a tendency toward overdependence on outside influences and allowed his own inventiveness and native sensibility to prevail.

A case in point is Ken Unsworth, whose work in the show dates from 1975. In that year he nursed his stepson during the course of a terminal illness, an experience that led to a radical transformation of his art. From his pre-1975 work—stone-site pieces, blending fetishism and ritual, and a constructivist paraphrase of *Nike of Samothrace*—he went on to create nearly self-mutilatory performance pieces. In one, his neck was pinched between two inward-leaning wooden beams, leaving his body dangling in the space between. Next came a series of stormy, nocturnal paintings where large birds ravaged helpless figures and man mutilated fellow man.

Clearly the performance pieces were re-enacting—and thereby expiating, through art and the body—the suffering that Unsworth's stepson had endured and that the artist could only witness. The paintings reflect a worldview shaped by that experience, one where the futility of effort—and the unrelievedness of pain—are the rule. They are indeed a far cry from the quietude and exuberance of his earlier work.

But it is the earlier work that rings most true, for it draws on and also masters the influences of other artists to create something original. Unsworth's stone-site pieces —collections of like stones suspended together or grouped in circles—reflect influences as diverse as Isamu Noguchi and Louise Bourgeois and yet articulate a highly personal sense of the sacred, magical place where they sit. Likewise, Unsworth's *Nike* updated the second-century-B.C. masterpiece through a magically simple vocabulary of steel planes, preserving all the energy and poise of the original.

In the exhibited paintings there was no such mastery of sources. They borrowed their form from the Neo-Expressionism of such painters as Enzo Cucchi—the theatricality and dramatic tonality—but without its substance. Moreover, Unsworth uses the form as a vehicle for an intense, unrestrained emotion and then embellishes it—as if the paintings weren't gruesome enough already —with elements of the grotesque (bodily functions, for example). Needless to say, there is no assimilation here, no feeling of absorption through an individual sensibility of what has been gleaned from the world. Rather one has the impression that Unsworth merely cast about for the most correct-looking form in which to express his unmodulated and strident feelings.

Interestingly, Unsworth's previous, more ritualistic manner was quite elastic enough to contain the expressionistic impulse. A 1970 work, *Rose Shed,* with its sexually charged, spiny forms, showed this. Far from being artistically impoverished by the "Australian predicament," he seems to have thrived on it. His problems only began when the barriers came down.

Where Unsworth's art was only briefly body-centered, that of another painter in the show, Mike Parr, has been exclusively so. (Parr was included in the Modern's "International Survey" show as well.) Born with no left arm, Parr has explored the idea of personal deformity and the ways it affects one's perception of oneself. His work in the P.S. 1 show juxtaposes expressionistic drawings of fruit with meticulously executed self-portraits that are radically foreshortened or otherwise distorted. One such work is *Do Padera Coco* (Self-Portrait as a Pear) *To Have Done with the Judgement of God.* The rather dubious point here seems to be that Parr's handicap has turned him into an object, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing and not a person, although it must be said that Parr's meaning here, as elsewhere in his work, is far from clear.

While Parr's drawing itself is often exquisite, his work as a whole never really comes together. Juxtaposition is for him an act of separation, not cohesion. He leaves us with parts, but no whole. Perhaps that is his point.

Far more interesting is the work of the last of the Australian artists in the P.S. 1 show: Immants Tillers. Here we do see those qualities of detachment and appropriation that are supposedly characteristically Australian, only in Tillers's case they are as much a function of biographical oddity as national circumstance.

Aside from being born and raised in Australia, Tillers is of Latvian extraction, which imposes an additional cultural perspective on his native one. It makes him see "culture" not as singular and basic, but as open-ended and relative. Accordingly, his paintings—rectangular composites of 10" x 15" boards—combine elements of modernism, aboriginal cave paintings, and Latvian folk illustration.

On one level these paintings are about the multiplicity of cultures and Tillers's own equivocal place in relation to the all. On another, they are about exploring and undermining the varied meanings of the word "art." Tillers's mentor is Duchamp, and it shows.

In *Pataphysical Man* Tillers makes de Chirico's 1926-27 *The Archaeologist*—a large reclining mannequin draped in robes and architectural fragments—the centerpiece. He then populates the painting with Latvian folk figures, figures from aboriginal cave paintings, and other characters of his own invention, who variously flee the giant or colonize it as landscape. Here and there will be a "cut"—a break in the fabric of the painting where a board has been whited over and filled with figures unrelated to everything else.

Tillers uses these disparate images to do three things: to imply unity (by relating figures through gesture and glance), to subvert that unity (with "cuts"), and to mediate between the two. He thus brings his paintings to the edge of coherence and holds them there, cheekily inquiring (one eye on the audience) how far he can go before they dissolve, before paintings cease to be paintings. This strategy sends him in the opposite direction from Duchamp, who in his "Readymades" inquired into the conditions under which non-art could be made into art.

Tillers's most telling stroke, however, is his *Stacks,* works where single paintings are piled board by board upon the floor. In one sense, the pictorial experience has been dismantled and turned away from us, tantalizingly offered in the traces of paint visible at the edges of the stacked boards and across the face of the topmost one, yet ultimately withheld. The effect is not unlike that of Jasper Johns's *The Canvas,* where a small canvas is faced to a larger one, the two covered in loose, grey brushwork. In both the Tillers and the Johns one feels as if a door has been slammed in one's face.

More profoundly, however, a *Stack* makes a painting into a thing as inert and impersonal as a chair; it no longer is a vehicle of experience. This kind of dispassionate literalism is not new. We saw it in the days of Minimalism, where in a six-foot steel cube you could find the current definition of sculpture. But in Tillers's case, the work's incarnation as a thing is more brutal, more inexorable, because we are aware of the past it once had, from which it now seems to have severed all connection. Moreover, in its new state it hardly seems intended to function as art anymore. There was never any doubt that Tony Smith's six-foot cube was sculpture: it was conceived and created in that context. And *The Canvas* is still something to be hung on a wall and pondered. But in a Tillers *Stack,* we have a painting taken apart and piled up as if ready for shipping. He has gone to work on the descriptive language of art, taking the phrase "art object," which collectors use to characterize what they own, and split it into two mutually exclusive conditions, "art" and "object."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His work charts the passage from one to the other.

Like Unsworth, Tillers is at his best when entirely himself. The paintings often work, but they are sometimes labored, self-consciously intellectual reworkings of ideas that have been propounded by others—David Salle, for example. The *Stacks,* however, are wholly original, and have the directness and immediacy of the best of such things. In a way Tillers has taken to heart the Dadaist injunction to use a Rembrandt as an ironing board, only he has done it with his own work.

Can we say, after all this—after the P.S. 1 show—that we have come closer to defining the Australian artistic personality in contemporary art? I do not think so. Many different characteristics are in evidence in this work, but even when grouped together they do not speak compellingly as a wholly Australian voice. Whereas we can say of contemporary Italian painting that it extends that country's tradition of metaphysical expression into modern art, or of contemporary German painting that it is heir to a native expressionist bent, we are at a loss when it comes to finding any comparable characterization of Australian art—at least, based on the work in this show. Instead one is confronted by an art that manifests diverse characteristics—some Australian, some European and American—in the process of defining itself. What this means is that, whatever its anthropological value, the "Australian Accent" show melts into other "art-from-everywhere" shows on the New York scene and, with the exception of Tillers's *Stacks,* fails to make a case for the distinction of its art.

The Art Students League of New York

215 W. 57th St., N.Y.C. 10019
(212) Circle 7-4510

Founded 1875

R. A. Florio, Executive Director

The 110th Regular Session begins September [illegible] and continues through May 25, 1985.

Students may register for classes at any time. Tuition is by the month. No entrance requirements. The League is an art school in the atelier tradition. Part-time as well as full time registration. Individual instruction. Life Models in most classes.

Life Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Figure Composition, Abstract Art, Graphics (Etching, Engraving, Lithography, Woodcut), Portrait Painting, Landscape, A.M., P.M., Late P.M. and Evening Classes. Saturday classes for children and adults. One and Two Evening a Week Classes.

Evening lectures on all kinds of subjects of interest to artists. Six to eight instructors to choose from. They represent different styles and tendencies in the current art scene. Write or telephone for illustrated catalogue showing work by instructors and by students.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

Whoring after self-respect

by Mimi Kramer

When it was first suggested to me that I review Paul Fussell's new book about "class," I naturally assumed that it was because I have so much of it. But a twenty-minute sojourn with *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*[1] was enough to convince me that I have no class whatever. Save your pity, though. According to Mr. Fussell I do not require it. Mr. Fussell discerns the existence of a new class, a set of people who defy categorization, and he makes it quite clear that this is the only class for anyone to aspire to because it is the only one with "class" at all.

Relax. If you are reading this review, then chances are that you, too, are an "X" person, or can easily become one. How do I know? Because Mr. Fussell has invented this "way out" of the class problem especially for you —you and him, that is. Throwing a stylistic arm around the reader's shoulder, "What about us?" he asks at the beginning of his last chapter: "What class are we in, and what do we feel about our entrapment there?" "Pretty rotten," I should think, had better be your answer to the second question, unless your answer to the first was an icily hostile "Are you kidding? None of the above!" The groups Mr. Fussell delineates—ranging from Bottom-out-of-sight to Top-out-of-sight, with Destitute, Low prole, Mid-prole, High prole, Middle, Upper-middle and Upper classes in between—are such as no self-respecting reader would want to be seen in. They are, according to Mr. Fussell,

> usefully imagined as a line of theaters running side by side down a long street. Each has a marquee and lots of posters on the front. Plays about self-respect are running constantly in all of them, from the most comfortable to the barest and meanest. But the odd thing is that there's no promotion from one theater to the next one up. And the important point is this: there's no one playing in any of these theaters, no matter how imposing, who isn't, much of the time, scared to death that he's going to stumble, muff his lines, appear in the wrong costume, or otherwise bomb.

Brought to you by Summit Books, *Class* is a little difficult to place. Summit, in case you don't know the imprint, is a division of Simon & Schuster with a new line in hardbound self-help for the semi-enlightened. Like most self-help books, Paul Fussell's invites you to sit at its author's feet and learn wisdom, in this case the lore of fashion, for *Class* isn't really about "class" so much as it is about style. Specifically, it is about how personal taste serves as an "indicator" of an individual's position in society. "When you look at a person," writes Mr. Fussell, "you don't see 'Roman Catholic' or 'liberal': you see 'hand-painted necktie' or 'crappy polyester shirt'; you hear *parameters* or *in regards to.*"

1 *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System,* by Paul Fussell; Summit Books, 224 pages, $14.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But *Class* is more than just a how-to book dressed up to look like instant sociology, although it's that too. In the tradition of such social critics and satirists as Russell Lynes and Nancy Mitford, *Class* offers the reader its author's observations on the intricate folly of everyday life in America, and as Mr. Fussell sets about analyzing and describing the customs and idiosyncrasies of the various strata of American society, his purpose is to amuse as much as to edify and instruct.

He begins his disquisition in a frolicsome spirit with the proposition that class is "a touchy subject:"

> When, recently, asked what I am writing, I have answered, "A book about social class in America," people tend first to straighten their ties and sneak a glance at their cuffs to see how far fraying has advanced there. Then, a few minutes later, they silently get up and walk away. It is not just that I am feared as a class spy. It is as if I had said, "I am working on a book urging the beating to death of baby whales using the dead bodies of baby seals." Since I have been writing this book I have experienced many times the awful truth of R. H. Tawney's perception, in his book *Equality* (1931): "The word 'class' is fraught with unpleasant associations, so that to linger upon it is apt to be interpreted as the symptom of a perverted mind and a jaundiced spirit."

That Mr. Fussell thinks he is funny is evident and, at the same time, mystifying; for this is a fairly representative sampling of his style: the effortful attempts at jocularity, the hyperbole unhampered by verbal agility, the too familiar quotation.

> Regardless of what we say about equality, I think everyone at some point comes to feel like the Oscar Wilde who said, "The brotherhood of man is not a mere poet's dream; it is a most depressing and humiliating reality."

Especially irritating is Mr. Fussell's willingness to rely on what other people have said before and better. It amounts to a sort of literary tic. He quotes incessantly, indiscriminately with no apparent reason. My favorite instance occurs in connection with some mail-order catalogues, where we find that

> King Lear, in saying "O reason not the need," would recognize what's going on here, and so, probably, would De Tocqueville, who wrote in 1845 . . .

. . . and never mind what Tocqueville wrote in 1845, because it doesn't really matter. The first fifteen pages of *Class* re-issue material from the writings of Russell Lynes, Studs Terkel, John O'Hara, Frances Trollope, Walt Whitman, William S. Barrett, Vance Packard, Max Weber, Jilly Cooper, Matthew Arnold, George Orwell, John F. Kennedy, Thorstein Veblen, H. L. Mencken, and *The Official Preppy Handbook*. One is left with the breathless impression, not that Mr. Fussell has read widely, but that he has an unusually dogged research assistant.

That being the case, one might expect Mr. Fussell's book to be informative. The subtitle, in fact—*A Guide Through the American Status System*—suggests to the reader that he is about to embark on a leisurely journey through unfamiliar terrain where Mr. Fussell's recherché knowledge and out-of-the-way commentary will elicit occasional cries of "Oh look, how quaint!" or even, "George, do you think people really *live* like that?" Unhappily, Mr. Fussell has not the special knowledge to make his book worth the detour any more than he has the temperament to make such an excursion pleasant. That gnomes are rarely seen on the lawns of the best houses nowadays; that book clubs are the last resort of people who need to be told what to read; that "legible" clothing is a common shortcut for the questing spirit's search for an identity; that the guest who arrives at your black-tie dinner in a car labeled "HONK TWICE IF YOU LOVE JESUS" has probably not been invited—these are the nature of Mr. Fussell's perceptions. They are the story of the pig thrown over the wall at Carcassonne, Anne Boleyn's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ghost in the Tower of London; and Paul Fussell's book is the Fodor's of social aesthetics, trotting out every twice-told tale of tourism with the self-assured sophistication of a guide in the Via Veneto: that rich people tend to be thin while the poor run to fat; that Christmas lights become gaudier the further you get from the right side of the tracks; etc. Such aperçues might occur to anyone in the exigencies of youth or idleness, but most people, I think, would be reluctant to utter, let alone publish, them. Not Mr. Fussell; nothing is beneath his notice or attention.

> The V-neck sweater, designed to prove conclusively that you're wearing a necktie, is for that reason middle class or even high-prole. It's hard to believe that sometimes people tuck pullovers into the top of their trousers, but I'm told they do.

Imagine!!! More than anything else, I think, Paul Fussell wants desperately to be contemptuous. In the manner of such deft humorists as Wilde, Shaw, Mencken, and Sidney Smith, he means to shower contempt on those inferior to himself. Well, there is certainly nothing wrong with that. The problem arises because the reader is at pains to find anyone in Mr. Fussell's book who fits that description. Disdain, properly wielded, requires a certain aloofness, a certain sense of being *above* the object of one's contempt. Mr. Fussell is above nothing and no one. He is fascinated by the "50-year-old man on the deck of a 35-foot Chris Craft drinking from a can of Bud . . . .": "He's high prole, and he's saved all his life for that horrible boat." He is spiteful about the "young woman lawyer in a large New York firm who likes to watch Shakespeare on Educational Television and to frequent restaurants said to serve gourmet food":

> She's hopelessly middle-class, and probably consumed with secret bitterness that she's not made upper-middle.

He is outraged by the pretensions of the "clean-cut young man" who uses "words like *interface, funding, dialogue, life-style* and *bottom-line.*"

> This guy's middle-class or even high-prole, a trainee with some hypertrophied corporation on his way to a "conference." He thinks he's giving off an upper-middle-class effect, but boy, is he wrong. He thinks he's going to be high in the company someday, but he's wrong there, too.

Got that, Mr. High-prole Management Trainee? Yah-boo, yah-boo, yah-boo!

Whether or not you ought to dash out and buy Paul Fussell's book probably depends a good deal on how excited you are capable of getting over questions of taste. Mr. Fussell is capable of getting very excited indeed. He is haunted by mail-order catalogues, "baffled" by neck-tie patterns. His prose is that of a man who, like James's Mrs. Gareth, has been kept awake for hours by the wallpaper in his bedroom. And, there would seem to be no limit to his capacity to be, like Mrs. Gareth, "rendered unhappy by the presence of the dreadful." At times he seems to have the natural attention span of a sparrow, flitting excitedly from crumb to crumb, unable to carry more than one morsel in its tiny beak. At other times he is driven to dwell on a subject and worry it beyond mercy or understanding.

> Imagine yourself an upper-middle-class visitor being shown around a middle-class "home." It all looks very nice, very clean and neat, etc. But one thing's puzzling: against a wall there's a tall, shallow display case made of walnut veneer with scores of long shelves protected from the world by a transparent acrylic "glass" front. You've never seen anything like it, and it gets even more puzzling the closer you inspect what it's displaying: hundreds of "novelty thimbles" crowded side by side in long ranks.
>
> "What's that?" you ask.
>
> "That's my thimble collection."
>
> "Your what?"
>
> "My thimble collection."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WALTER
DARBY BANNARD

Recent Paintings
September 8 - 29

M. Knoedler & Co.
19 East 70 Street. New York 10021. Telephone (212) 794-0550

"Ummm. Where do you—ahem—get them all?"

"From catalogs."

"Where?"

"Mail-order catalogs."

You realize with a start that this country must be swarming with middle-class novelty-thimble collectors. And this sweet lady who's showing you her collection thinks not merely that it's interesting; she thinks it's valuable, and that's the awful thing.

I feel very sorry for this woman. Her presence is implied everywhere in these middle-class catalogs . . . .

Paul Fussell reminds me of a friend of mine, Janice, who used to stand in the middle of Bloomingdale's with tears pouring down her cheeks, "weeping for humanity," she used to call it. Janice swore that whenever she found herself on the escalator between the first and second floors, surveying the hoards of mindless people swarming in their mad consumer blindness, an inexpressible sadness would come over her and . . . well, that was when the tears would come. Personally, I don't think she was weeping for humanity at all. I think she just didn't like people very much and hated being any place where there were a lot of them.

Paul Fussell does a lot of this sort of weeping in his book. He laments the existence of the innumerable state universities and community colleges dotted across the continent. ("It's not hard to understand the way these feeble institutions take root and grow into plausibility.") He mourns at the thought of Southern Illinois University, "a mere teachers college" that "now enrolls 26,000 students and has its own 'university press,' although it's located in Carbondale, Illinois, a backwater without significant intellectual meaning or cultural tradition." He weeps for the attempts of the semi-educated to make themselves respectable by gentrifying the language.

Pseudo-Latinism is another useful technique. *In colleges* has a measly four syllables, but *in academia* has six, just as *in the suburbs* has four

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> but *in suburbia* five, and in addition conveys a suggestion that the speaker is familiar with the classical tongues. (A real Latinist would honor the accusative case and say *in suburbiam*, but let that pass.)

Actually, before trying out the phrase *"in suburbiam"* on "a real Latinist," I think perhaps that Mr. Fussell had better check on that. (Almost any first-year Latin grammar ought to be able to set him straight on the uses of the accusative with the preposition *in*.)

In other areas Mr. Fussell is equally unreliable. He incorrectly rates parquet floors above hardwood, for instance, and lumps Land's End and L. L. Bean together as being indistinguishably *infra dig*. Of course, if you want to get technical about floors, hardwood (under its new designation "bare stripped wood") has become infinitely more fashionable than stodgy old parquet, and Land's End and L. L. Bean are not the same thing at all: the former, granted, may be fraught with unpleasantly upper-middle-class associations (as well as grotesque clothing), but L. L. Bean is quite okay. After all, the boarding-school set still patronizes L. L. Bean, although not that area of men's tailoring and haberdashery where the really *old* money has fled to, J. Press, leaving Brooks Bros. to the arrivistes. Fussell does not notice these distinctions. He foolishly dismisses beer as a lower or lower-middle class beverage when, in fact, beer—now acceptable in almost any social sphere or situation—has become the only really safe drink around. (And recent developments in beer-snobbery have made the social stratification of various particular brews an intricate and fascinating subject.)

In the field of hats Mr. Fussell's observations are sheer lunacy. His analysis of the phenomenon of the "dark-blue visored 'Greek fisherman's cap' as merchandised through *The New Yorker*" is a veritable bouillabaisse of inaccuracies:

> When worn, this item was designed to state, "I've been to Greece and am thus well-to-do, rich enough to fly long distances on Olympic Airlines [*sic*], as well as adventurous enough to relish exotic things like retsina, taramasalata, etc." But the problem with this headwear was its proletarian associations . . . .

Of course this is nonsense. The so-called "Greek fisherman's cap" (featured in most of the important headshots of Arthur Miller) was specifically adopted for its proletarian associations and favored by Marxist academics and left-leaning intellectuals who would not be caught dead on Olympic Airways. As to Mr. Fussell's rash assertion that "To take any hat seriously is to descend," I for one consider hats to be one of the very few subjects really worthy of my attention. Alas, Mr. Fussell's priorities and his fashion sense would seem to be no better than his philology.

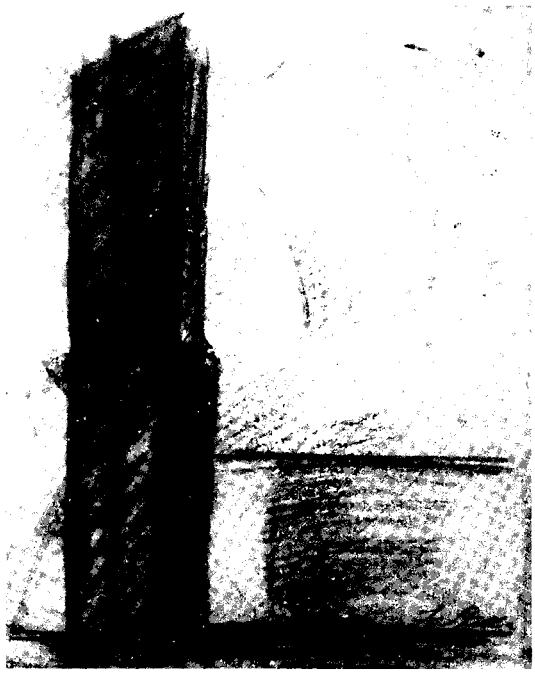
Still, all of this is merely to out-Fussell Fussell; and none of these inaccuracies seem to me as puzzling as the more general mistaken assumption that underlies his book: this notion that matters of class and status are something that most people get frightfully fussed about. I don't really think they are. What's more, I don't even think Mr. Fussell thinks they are. I don't believe in the woman on page sixteen who, "asked by a couple of interviewers if she thought there were social classes in this country, answered: 'It's the dirtiest thing I've ever heard of!'" People just don't talk like that. As for this ". . . people tend to sneak a glance at their cuffs" business in the opening paragraph, I don't think the people Paul Fussell is likely to meet socially would tend to worry too much about their cuffs fraying. I think they're far more likely to have stood around antiquing their cuffs for several hours with a rasp. But then, that's one of the problems with *Class*: the author, playing exasperatingly dumb, takes a hundred and fifty pages to arrive at an idea that, for most of his readers, would *begin* any interesting discussion of class in America.

Toward the end of his book Paul Fussell discovers the notion of reverse snobbery

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

20th Century American Modernism

September 8–October 3



Joseph Stella
Skyscraper—Study for "The Voice of New York Interpreted"
c. 1919, watercolor, pencil on paper
19¾" x 15½"

Robert Schoelkopf Gallery *50 W 57 NY 10019*

(throw that man a fish!). And so captivated is he with his *trouvé* that he makes it the defining characteristic of that superior class that "you and him" belong to. There is, Mr. Fussell points out, one group of people whose "insolence, intelligence, irony, and spirit" set them apart from the rest of benighted America and who, "by a strenuous effort of discovery in which curiosity and originality are indispensable," have truly found "the only escape from class." Members of "category X" constitute "something like a classless class," or "a sort of unmonied aristocracy."

> They occupy the one social place in the U.S.A. where the ethic of buying and selling is not all-powerful.

They are a very attractive bunch, these "X people," the sort of chaps who can do just about anything; they are "good at languages," for instance, and "can deliver whole paragraphs in French, Italian, German or Spanish, and sometimes Russian or Chinese," as well as being "unostentatiously familiar with the street layouts and landmarks of London, Paris, and Rome—and sometimes Istanbul and Karachi." (Gosh, I don't even know where Karachi is!) X people "are almost never fat, for they exercise a lot, naturally and for the fun of it." They have an awful lot of fun, in fact:

> Favorite X sport: ad hoc games of touch football, especially while slightly drunk.

X people "never belong to book clubs," because "they choose their own books entirely themselves." Imagine being able to do that! As you can see, "X people" can do pretty much whatever they want to. What's more, they "adore the work they do and they do it until they are finally carried out, 'retirement' being a concept meaningful only to hired personnel or wage slaves who despise their work."

> They tend to be self-employed, doing what social scientists call autonomous work. If, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> [C. Wright] Mills has said, the middle-class person is "always somebody's man," the X person is nobody's, and his freedom from supervision is one of his most obvious characteristics. X people are independent-minded, free of anxious regard for popular shibboleths, loose in carriage and demeanor.

So who are these guys, anyway? Well—and this may surprise you—"many of them are writers." But there's more to it than that:

> The old-fashioned term *bohemians* gives some idea; so does the term *the talented*. Some Xs are intellectuals, but a lot are not: they are actors, musicians, artists, sports stars, "celebrities," well-to-do former hippies, confirmed residers abroad, and the more gifted journalists, those whose by-lines intelligent readers recognize with pleasant anticipation.

Like Gore Vidal. No, I'm serious! That's what he says: "Some members, like Gore Vidal, enter from the upper class. Some, like James Jones, come from the proles, or even the destitute." But that's because "you are not born an X person," you can only "become one."

Because they "disdain the standard kinds of status display," X people tend to lead fashion rather than follow it.

> Since there's no one they think worth impressing by mere appearance, X people tend to dress for themselves alone, which means they dress comfortably and generally 'down.' . . . When an X person, male or female, meets a member of an identifiable class, the costume, no matter what it is, conveys the message, "I am freer and less terrified than you are," or—in extreme circumstances—"I am more intelligent and interesting than you are: please do not bore me."

That's quite a mouthful; I wonder how long it takes to put together a costume like that. Needless to say, X people live where they like. They "move away when they, not their bosses, feel they should":

> They like where they live, and when they stop liking their location—when, for example, it seems drifting too speedily middle- or prole-wards—they move.

That must get rather irritating, after a while, always having to pick up and leave every time the yobs catch up to you; but then X people seem to be willing to spend a good deal of their time keeping ahead of the yobs. This business of dressing "down" for instance:

> One degree down will usually do the trick: if black tie is designated, an X person appears in a dark suit (of a distinctly unstylish, archaic cut) and a notable necktie. If suits are expected, he omits the tie. If "informal" is the proclaimed style, his jeans will be torn and patched, his cords very used, if not soiled. If others are wearing bathing suits, X people are likely to show up naked.

All this sounds fairly complicated. And what does an X person do if he gets it wrong? Does he carry around a spare suit of clothes (a couple of degrees up or down either way) in the back seat of his "unstylish and most often unwashed" car?

> X people are likely to appear with unexplained sexual partners and some have been known to become pregnant at socially inappropriate moments.

Such as when? At dinner? Gee, that must be a bit uncomfortable! Can the other guests just go on talking, or would that be rude?

There are a number of questions that Mr. Fussell doesn't probe quite deeply enough and others he leaves unanswered. For instance, we learn that the "guiding principle" of interior decoration and landscaping, for X people, is "parody display," so that "there may be an elephant's foot umbrella stand and some unlikely manifestations of the art of the taxidermist" inside, while "the lawn and yard of the X house . . . often give off powerful satiric overtones." But he doesn't tell us what X people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

talk about. To each other, I mean. Or is conversation between two X's completely unnecessary? Perhaps their clothing is so eloquent that an entire volley of exchanges can be accomplished without either ever having to open his mouth? And where—between strengthening the satiric overtones in one's yard and playing touch football and deciding where to put the elephant's-foot umbrella stand—do X people find time to do all those things they adore so much: like their work? The kind of things one *really* wants to know about X people Fussell never goes into.

But I'm being flippant and perhaps I shouldn't be, because there *is* a certain amount of truth in all of this. Paul Fussell has actually hit on something. But—like Columbus blundering about in the Bahamas—he seems not really to have understood what he has found. Mr. Fussell thinks that he has happened on some rare, exotic country on the far edge of the world, an India, a land of spice; but a slightly less skewed picture of how the world is shaped suggests that he has simply discovered another vacation resort, well populated and old-hat, indeed, a little *démodé*.

The X person exists, certainly; and you don't have to be Paul Fussell to know someone who resembles him. But all that Mr. Fussell has discovered is the phenomenon of the intellectual or academic elite, the "media and lit" people who now shape taste the way manufacturers and purveyors of home decorations used to. Thus, Mr. Fussell offers his readers no escape from status anxiety. He simply institutionalizes reverse snobbery. In doing so, he misses the one interesting aspect in all this nonsense about class and taste.

My friend Janice used to say, "There are two kinds of people in the world: Brie-people and those of us who have transcended Brie." She liked to oversimplify, my friend Janice, but she had a point. The world probably is divided into people who inherit a "style," either from the fashions around them or from their background, and those

NOVELS
by J. Inchardi

$13 each

An American Trilogy

Lines On The Death Of A Fisherman

Three Jews In A Tub

Dreamship

An Allegorical Trilogy

Yurros

A Paper Toy

Intercurse

A Demonic Trilogy

Jehovah Mafioso

Saturn Maru

Drek Shlak

Order by mail from **Sirius Books**
P.O. Box 177, Freeport, Maine 04032

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who don't. For those who don't there is always something to have transcended—it isn't always Brie, but there is always something.

And that's where the whole question of Brie and non-Brie gets interesting. For what does the non-Brie person do when he is presented with Brie as a *fait accompli,* when there is no Chevre to be had? Does he go hungry? Does he embarrass his host by faulting the cheeseboard publicly? Or does he allow something else—good fellowship or manners—to supersede taste in motivating his actions? There is, I think, a certain amount of non-Brie in all of us—because we live in a society in which Brie can be easily attained and easily transcended. It is only a question of how far you will allow a piece of cheese to lead you.

The word "class," of course, has two meanings in this context. It can refer to a socio-economic group (as in the expression, "Mommy, what class are we in?") or it can mean "style" or "savoir faire" (as in "Oh, Harry, I thought you were going to take me to a place that had some class!"). Throughout his book, Mr. Fussell fudges the distinction, which is odd, considering that he used to make his living spending time with Samuel Johnson and his friends, writing books about Pope and Dryden, and teaching eighteenth-century literature at one of those state universities he has so much contempt for. It is odd that he is not more of a stickler for definitions. Class and taste are not the same at all.

I honestly don't think that status is something people care very deeply about—not the people for whom Mr. Fussell is writing his book, anyway. Taste, however, is. I know people who are so embarrassed by the strains of Tammy Wynette singing "Stand By Your Man" or Julie Andrews singing anything at all that they will begin to whistle Bruckner's Mass in E minor in a crowded restaurant, who are so threatened by Trump Tower that, walking along Fifth Avenue, they will deliver a lengthy disquisition on the virtues of Philip Johnson although they know no more about architecture than Julie Andrews or Tammy Wynette.

In a world where class can change as easily as it can in the lives of the people who might possibly read Paul Fussell's book, "status" does not have much power to engage people's emotions. But taste is a very "touchy" matter indeed. I knew a young man in England, a university student, whose father worked in a wallpaper factory in Leeds. One night in a pub Ben told me a little bit about his background and what it had been like growing up with a father who could not understand his ambitions to win a scholarship to study at Oxford. The story had a poignant twist, though, for there had been one summer, after Ben's first year at Oxford, when he'd gone back to work in the factory and discovered that his father was actually proud of him, had boasted about him to his "mates." They knew all about "Stan's son at the university" and where his father kept the clippings from all of the scholarship examinations he had passed.

Ben was no fool. He knew exactly what kind of a story he was telling, and he told it well. Then I asked a question (I can't remember what) and another story came pouring out. This one was about objects, not events, a ring that his father had wanted to give him for his twenty-first birthday and an antique clock that Ben had wanted instead. The ring—the family's traditional gift for a son reaching majority—was a signet ring (Ben gave me a look, "I *ask* you!" and I cringed appropriately), the clock Art Deco. In the end, they had given him the clock. But the funny part of the story—and here Ben faltered and lit another cigarette and laughed—the funny bit was what his Dad, his mother told him, had said to her as they were going to bed the night before his birthday: "I must say, I don't know what he wants that bloody clock for. It's secondhand!"

This was a story about class background Ben could tell me (and Lord knows how many other people in how many other pubs all over England) without even pausing for a swallow. But what made his eyes go a little misty, what made him get up quickly to buy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another round, was, I think, a sense of shame. There was, of course, some shame in the notion that one's father should not know the aesthetic value of an Art Deco clock. But what moved Ben, I think, was some sense that to *know* that one's father has bad taste is a churlish, an ungentlemanly thing to know.

Class is your advantages or lack of them, and society gives most of us a sufficient number of acceptable ways for handling how we feel about what we never had or had too much of. But taste is your background, your childhood; it is the Time-Life books or the potted palms or the tacky plate that stood on a shelf by the door in the house you grew up in. And society hands you no ready-made formula for civilizing your feelings about the Time-Life books and the tacky plate. "Entering category X," writes Mr. Fussell, "often requires flight from parents or forebears." But here, as so often in his book, Mr. Fussell is being either foolish or disingenuous. For the education of individual taste always entails a "flight" from one's background. That is what the development of a personal style is all about. What makes the difference between a snob and a gentleman in the spectrum of Dissociation-from-Brie is how the "aesthete" feels about his escape.

That Mr. Fussell misses all this suggests that he has actually had to do something quite difficult. He has managed to be a student of literature without having gotten anything out of it; and having learned nothing from the great snobs of Western civilization, he finds himself unable to understand them, unable to do anything, in fact, but resemble them. For this conflict between Brie and non-Brie—one of the few instances in everyday life in America where the concept of "the gentleman" comes into play—is a basic conflict one encounters in the English novel: in Dickens, in Jane Austen, in Trollope, and in Henry James. Ask a Darcy or a Pip the underlying moral question of Mr. Fussell's book—"What does the gentleman do when he is confronted by vulgarity?"—and he will tell you: he embraces it. In novelistic terms, in fact, he marries it. The creature Mr. Fussell has created in his final chapter is no gentleman, no "unmonied aristocrat," but a sort of Nietzschean Super-snob patterned after himself. As for his book, I don't know quite what sort of cheese to call it.

Deprivation's laureate

Philip Larkin Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 315 pages, $17.95.

reviewed by Donald Hall

Book reviewers observe a law that Moses forgot to bring down from the mountain: *Thou shalt not praise miscellaneous collections of periodical pieces.* When I read censure of an author for gathering fugitive pieces, I usually respond by buying the book. Second-rate work from a first-rate writer has its utility. We would not read Henry James's potboiling short stories or travel sketches or letters if we did not love *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors*; and by-blows cast light on the great work. The perfected work of art stays within itself; the dashed-off journalism releases incoherent, suggestive, sometimes brilliant flashes of illumination. Why else should we read disquisitions on Pee Wee Russell and Fats Waller by a middle-aged English librarian? Even Philip Larkin's praise for James Bond sheds minor light on *The Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings,* and *High Windows.*

Required Writing includes two interviews, introductions to other writers, occasional reminiscences, talks, book reviews, and notices of jazz records. The autobiographical pieces are wholly charming—alert, attentive, intimate. Of course he will never do it, but what a wonderful autobiography Larkin could write, about a life in which nothing has happened: always the most interesting autobiography.

Larkin's reputation makes him a forbidding figure, even misanthropic, but these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

essays turn out to be companionable. He is almost ingratiating when he praises what he loves. And he is funny, a masterful ironist: at the beginning of an essay about childishness in poets, he writes, "Some of my older readers may remember a passage in which its author asserts that, although he was a child himself once and childhood is all very well in its way, when he became a man he put away childish things." Larkin reviews surprisingly miscellaneous books. Some literary editor, decades back, had the genius to hire Philip Larkin to write about Lawrence Lipton's *The Holy Barbarians,* that hymn of praise to the Beat Generation of Venice, California. Elsewhere he reviews mystery stories, a biography of Francis Thompson, Anthony Powell's novels and Barbara Pym's, even the poems of Sylvia Plath. Certain names recur: William Barnes, W. H. Davies, Wilfred Owen, John Betjeman, Stevie Smith. And the figure in the carpet is Thomas Hardy.

On the one hand, Larkin admires and praises good poets overlooked or condescended to by modernists. On the other, he condescends to the modernists, and his aesthetic reaction runs through these writings. The dread trio of P's—Picasso, Pound, and Parker (this is *Charlie* Parker, whose "thin and . . . shrill" music replaced "simple heartfelt" Dixieland Jazz)—resides in his lowest infernal circle. His version of modern art is simple and doubtless heartfelt, and it resembles notions of modernism that can be discovered in any English middle-class drawing room. Larkin is the purest philistine. Picasso is the fellow who puts the nose on the side of the face, don't you know? We hear of "a play in which the characters sit in dustbins." The enemy is mostly foreigners—poetry's downfall can be attributed to the "the culture-mongering activities of the Americans Eliot and Pound"—but one also hears of a nameless modernist sculptor who "has carved human figures with large holes in them."

In an early essay on "The Pleasure Principle" Larkin suggests that popularity in poetry need not be a sign of failure. Good enough. We may remember Robert Frost's suggestion, not much admired in the academy, that poetry must survive the test of the marketplace. In Larkin's version of literary history, Eliot and Pound took poetry away from the people and broke "the strong connection between poetry and the reading public that had been forged by Kipling, Housman, Brooke, and *Omar Khayyám.*" Doubtless this case needs putting forward (more in America than in England) but it comes up against serious questions. I do not believe, from reading his essay about Brooke, that Larkin would seriously contend that Brooke is a better poet than T. S. Eliot. And what about *truly* popular poets? Martin Tupper outsold Tennyson, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox Rupert Brooke. Edgar Guest was more popular than Robert Frost when Frost was young, and Rod McKuen when Frost was old.

Of course the late John Betjeman provides Larkin with his major contemporary locus for the pleasure principle in poetry. To this reader Betjeman's popularity belongs to the history of English taste and not to the history of literature. In his long essay on Betjeman, Larkin asks rhetorically, "Can it be that, as Eliot dominated the first half of the twentieth century, the second half will derive from Betjeman?" The answer seems fairly clear.

The weakest writing in this book appears in Larkin's essay introducing Betjeman to an American audience, largely because Larkin has no notion of whom he addresses. He staggers into ghastly sentences, pursuing a tone that he imagines will sound punchy to the American ear: "The toughminded Bowra knew he had picked a winner." Could it be that the librarian at Hull prepped for his introduction by reading *Time*? Searching to praise the Laureate in terms that touch transatlantic hearts, this master of coherent metaphor invents a nervous monkey wrench: "No wonder our keen critical tools twitch fretfully at his approach."

Larkin generally condescends to Americans, often in naïve asides, as when he tells his English audience, apropos Sylvia Plath, "like many Americans she had a psychia-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trist." It is no great matter. At other times his xenophobia resorts to the classic English device of pretended ignorance. He snubs Donald Davie, who wrote a book called *A Sequence For Francis Parkman,* by pretending not to know who Parkman is—". . . one of his American friends, perhaps." When an interviewer asks him if there are other poet-librarians about, like Larkin and Jorge Luis Borges, Larkin answers, "Who's Jorge Luis Borges?"

If one needed reminding, these essays bring to mind Larkin's disastrous *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse,* which prints more than two hundred English poets of this century, most with one or two bouncy rhymes. The selection minimizes poets who are difficult or foreign-sounding, and prints interminable pages of doggerel, including a long stanzaic quarrel between Alex Comfort and George Orwell. (There are ten pages by Sir John Squire, sixteen lines by Geoffrey Hill.) In his essays, as in his anthology, Larkin celebrates an English tradition, but it is not the tradition of George Herbert, Henry King, and Gerard Manley Hopkins; he praises the Lightweight Tradition.

But that's enough grumping. Larkin's silliness is essential to his excellence, and this book would be worth reading even for a handful of sentences that become touchstones of Larkinism: "It is fatal to decide, intellectually, what good poetry is because you are then in honor bound to try to write it, instead of the poem that only you can write." "Deprivation is for me what daffodils are for Wordsworth."

In obedience to his theory of no-theory, Larkin is a monument to the poem that only he can write—and any ability is also a disability or a limitation. Larkin recollects with generosity his conversations with Vernon Watkins, that neglected poet who was Dylan Thomas's great friend—Welsh, bardic, romantic, altogether un-Larkinish: "In Vernon's presence poetry seemed like a living stream, in which one had only to dip the vessel of one's devotion." Here Larkin's irony is not merely self-protective. Larkin understands, and I believe he regrets, that this is the quality which his own work lacks.

If Larkin spends much time defending the Lightweight Tradition—allowing himself *not* to quote Sanskrit in his poems, *not* to write poems about foreign cities—the author of "Aubade" and "The Whitsun Weddings" is nobody's lightweight. Pasternak said that the pose comes first, the poems after. The pose or attitude of a poet often helps dismiss the demands of his elders, and frees the poet into his own voice or manner. Larkin's devotion to the pleasure principle, his praise for simplicity and clarity, even his popularity, create a mask behind which he makes poems of perfect intelligence and complexity.

In the best of these occasional pieces of prose, one finds not only the necessary pose —lightweight, reactionary, simple, and heartfelt—but the complex, moral, traditional, literary intelligence of English poetry. There is a shrewd and learned essay on Andrew Marvell, the member from Hull, which the librarian from Hull swotted up for an anniversary. Here Larkin's ironic intelligence casts a gloomy and skeptical eye over the vagaries of literary history. Deprivation's laureate ruminates: "Every poet's reputation fades in so far as his language becomes unfamiliar, his assumptions outmoded, and his subject-matter historical . . . ."

Larkin is best of all on the poet he has learned most from. His early master was Yeats, courtesy of Vernon Watkins, but Yeats would not do for Larkin—too bardic, too eloquent, too . . . *Irish.* His great master is Thomas Hardy, poet's poet, loved by all good poets after Eliot who condescended to him. Reviewing Emma Hardy's *Some Recollections,* Larkin writes one of those passages I had in mind when I spoke of fugitive pieces casting light on the best work:

> Not till his first wife had died could Hardy's love poetry for her be written, and then it was mixed with a flood of regret and remorse for what he had lost. This kind of paradox is in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> separable from poetic creation, and indeed from life altogether. At times it almost appears a sort of basic insincerity in human affection. At others it seems a flaw built deeply into the working of the emotions, creating an inevitable bias in life towards unhappiness.

These lines alone would keep *Required Writing* near at hand.

Art and mystery

Denis Donoghue The Arts Without Mystery. Little, Brown, 151 pages, $15.95

reviewed by Roger Kimball

In *The Arts Without Mystery,* Denis Donoghue argues that modern society's commitment to science and rational explanation has tended to bleed the arts of their most powerful asset—what he calls their "mystery"—and has thus rendered them "safe" and, in an important sense, beside the point. If we give the term "mystery" a wide berth, it is difficult not to agree. For if the arts were once valued as vehicles of truth, articulating insights that transcend our conceptual grasp, they are no longer. The modern conception of reality has relieved the arts of this lofty charge, relegating them to the status of "superior amusements," mere aesthetic games.

Against this, Professor Donoghue seeks to "reinstate mystery and to distinguish it from mere bewilderment or mystification." His basic contention is that modern society has disarmed and "neutralized" the arts by assimilating them and making them too familiar, too *gemütlich.* In part, he argues, this is due to the tendency of "bourgeois society" to absorb what opposes it. "The removal of mystery from the arts," he writes, "is one of the ways in which our society tries to tame the occult and its offence." But at bottom, the elision of "mystery" follows from the rationalist—one might say Cartesian—bias of modernity that tends to identify the real with what can be known clearly and distinctly. Hence Professor Donoghue is wont to criticize the "modern vanity which supposes that everything can be known or that only what is knowable has a claim upon our interest" and to extoll a view of art that comports itself "in the light of figurativeness as such, respecting the sense of life which finds expression in paradox, metaphor, and tautology."

Naturally, Professor Donoghue's conception of the arts underscores their power to challenge, antagonize, interrogate. "My own understanding," he writes,

> is that we receive the arts most completely not when we pay lip service to them but when the relation between art and society is mostly one of conflict and suspicion, if not hostility . . . . [M]iddle-class society has discovered how to achieve its victory [over mystery] by pretending that nobody has been defeated. Especially since the turmoil of 1968, societies have learnt that they can deal with dissent by incorporating it . . . . Today, both the alienation of the artist and the antagonism of public opinion to art have been successfully liquidated.

Of course, one might wonder whether the only real alternatives to "lip service" were conflict, suspicion, and hostility. Even now, even in the midst of this "modern bourgeois society," couldn't an authentic experience of art equally well involve a feeling of harmony, a sense of admiration, a flush of gratitude? Has our society really denied us such sensitivities? It would seem that Professor Donoghue's conception of the arts favors starker, more Romantic notions: "If the arts don't hurt," he asks, "why have them?" He might have found an appropriate motto for these reflections in Rilke's first *Duino Elegy*:

> For the beautiful is nothing
> But the beginning of a terror we can just
> barely endure,
> And we so adore it because it serenely disdains
> To destroy us.

But in fact his position turns out to be more accommodating, more realistic. For he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acknowledges that the experience of art is a dialectic of known and unknown, question and answer, hostility and acceptance; and he concludes by recognizing that just as we must struggle to keep ourselves alive to the "negative" aspects of art, so too we must integrate that negativity into our day-to-day experience. "In the end," he writes, "the techniques of management will kidnap any work of art . . . . But the end can be postponed, and there is merit in postponing it."

The Arts Without Mystery is an expanded version of Professor Donoghue's 1982 Reith Lectures, an annual English series of six lectures that is (he explains in his introduction) broadcast over the BBC and published *seriatim* in the BBC's magazine, *The Listener*. Besides the brief introduction, Professor Donoghue's additions to the original consist of numerous marginal notes, set in italics and segregated in boxes from the body of the text, and six commentaries, which he has appended severally to each of the lectures. The marginal notes are by way of afterthoughts, providing the reader with further examples, reflections, disclaimers; the commentaries, which are usually as long and in some cases longer than the lectures themselves, offer sustained versions of the marginalia. Professor Donoghue informs us that, shortly after he delivered the lectures, the London television program *Voices* devoted an episode to them; there he discussed some of the issues he had raised with a small panel that included the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton. Both the notes and commentaries make frequent reference to that exchange, taking up points that were urged there against Professor Donoghue's position, and elaborating on themes that he felt he had slighted in the lectures.

But the metamorphosis from lecture to published text is often problematic. We tend to expect rather more in the way of density, qualification, and nuance from the written page than from the spoken word, and are not infrequently disappointed when we turn to study the text of a lecture we had admired. What had seemed so complete and marvelously wrought, so *necessary,* in the telling reveals lapses and lacunae when read. Professor Donoghue's procedure—keeping the lectures intact but supplying a garland of notes and commentary—is clearly meant to solve that problem without sacrificing the verve and immediacy of oratory.

I wish I could report favorably on the result. For I have no doubt that Professor Donoghue's performance stirred his audience and occasioned much enthusiasm. His topic could hardly have been better—art and mystery and modern society together—and his prose, as usual, is lively and full of catchy formulations. But the ensemble fails. Perhaps this failure is due in part to Professor Donoghue's attempting too much in too brief a compass: art *and* mystery *and* modern society in one hundred and fifty-one pages. Yet in the end, the book fails because he really attempted too little. He garnered, it seems, sundry ideas about the place of art in modern society; but instead of working them out carefully and systematically, he chose to rely on a few current clichés about art and artists and on his undeniable rhetorical gifts.

Indeed, it is symptomatic that the tautest and best sustained stretch of writing in the book appears in the commentary to the last chapter, the bulk of which, we learn, Professor Donoghue first published as a separate essay in *The Sewanee Review* in 1977. Otherwise, the notes and commentaries read more like entries from a journal or a commonplace book than well-considered critical prose. Thus in the commentary to the first chapter, Professor Donoghue responds to Terry Eagleton's charge that "mystery is an authoritarian concept to use about the arts" by stringing together a few quotations from Gilles Deleuze's *Proust et les signes,* Walter Benjamin's *Reflections,* and Roberto Unger's difficult *Knowledge and Politics* (mistitled *Knowledge and Power* in the text) and bridging the whole with some rather flaccid musings about the unity and "interrogative" power of art. And the lectures themselves so abound in questionable assertions ("we pay attention to most things now as if they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

television programmes"; "only where there is real belligerence between official and unofficial values is worthwhile art possible") that the reader is inoculated against the many engaging suggestions that Professor Donoghue offers along the way.

In general, his arguments do not have the force or integrity of his best opinions. For example, he claims to discern a deliberate "escape from the mysteriousness of the work" of art in the widespread tendency to look beyond the work to the artist and his intention in making it.

> When we look at a contemporary painting in a gallery, we search for the artist's name and the title of the painting, if it has one. We do this not out of mere helplessness or curiosity but in the hope of seeing the work as the fulfilment of an intention . . . . We are led straight from the work to the psychology of the artist and from there to the economics of the market . . . . It is comforting to be in the presence of intentions we understand because the considerations of psychology and economics aren't at all mysterious: discussion of them is easy.

One may be all too familiar with the phenomenon Professor Donoghue describes here. But to say that a work of art is the product of an intention is hardly to discount its mysteriousness; nor is it necessarily to reduce the work to a set of intentions that are alien to its essence (the so-called "intentional fallacy"). On the contrary, our recognition of a work's intentional structure is inseparable from our recognition of it *as* art. For art, as distinct from natural beauty, is an embodied intention; just this allows us to distinguish it as a *work* of art. Thus Kant observes in the *Critique of Judgment* that "if the object is given as a product of art . . . there must be at bottom in the first instance a concept of what the thing is to be." This is true of all art, but perhaps most notably of contemporary art, much of which deliberately blurs the border between "art" and "non-art." Professor Donoghue may in fact be only incidentally interested in the question of art's intentionality; but here as elsewhere the carelessness of his analysis tends to obscure his point and threatens to render his argument unintelligible.

Probably the chief strength of *The Arts Without Mystery* lies in Professor Donoghue's commitment to the ultimate inscrutability of art. This is not to say, however, that he has been entirely clear about the nature of this inscrutability. Invocation of the term "mystery" is not enough; nor, I think, is Professor Donoghue's facile distinction between "problems" and genuine "mystery": "a problem is something to be solved," he tells us, while "a mystery is something to be witnessed and attested." But how do we know which is which, whether we should attempt to explain and understand or merely be content to "witness"?

One might object that mystery itself is the sort of thing that can be instanced but not analyzed. But if the task is to "reinstate mystery and to distinguish it from mere bewilderment or mystification," then we will naturally want to know upon what criteria this distinction will be made. Presumably, the phenomena in question do not obviously proclaim their allegiance, so it does not really help to be told that "the criteria are found in the work of art, fulfilled in whatever degree one's critical judgement suggests."

And the problem is compounded by Professor Donoghue's vacillating use of the term "mystery." Sometimes, it appears, "mystery" tokens little more than a feeling or intuition that resists exhaustive explanation. But at other times—as when he describes mystery as "a truth offered only by divine revelation"—it would seem to carry a heavier ontological charge. Unfortunately, by neglecting these issues, Professor Donoghue comes close to reinstating bewilderment and mystification, at the expense of their legitimate cousin, mere mystery.

It is clear that Professor Donoghue's insistence on the importance of mystery in art flows from his conviction that the nature of reality itself is ultimately mysterious. And this idea in turn is tied to his eminently unmysterious conviction that language is not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commensurate with reality, that reality transcends—and in some sense provides a measure for—our descriptions of it. Thus he takes issue with contemporary fashion in literary criticism, castigating its "idolatry of language" and calling instead for a view of language that recognizes the sense in which language remains subordinate to the reality it reveals. About Derrida's insistence on the place of "play" and "gesture" in language, for example, he observes that "'language as gesture' is most fully realized not when its speaking intention is discarded but when it speaks with a sense of its own limits." And elsewhere he notes that he wants discourse to allow "for the sense in which the only adequate expression is poetry; and the poetry is adequate only insofar as it beckons beyond itself. I refuse to regard that 'beyond' as self-bewilderment or mystification."

Nevertheless, it is difficult to know just what status Professor Donoghue would have us accord the work of art. On the one hand, his persistent lobbying for the rehabilitation of mystery in the arts, together with his commendable opposition to the alleged autonomy of language, would seem to suggest opposition to the view of art as more or less autonomous free play. And in fact there is much in Professor Donoghue's rhetoric that signals his opposition to this view. But the particulars of his argument are more ambiguous. In the end, he seems to want to have it both ways. Does he, finally, regard art as more than a "superior amusement," more than an aesthetic game? Drawing on a tradition that goes back to Aristotle, he notes that the arts provide oases of apparent self-sufficiency in the midst of the endless round of means and ends that determine daily life. It is in this sense that the arts have been said to be useless; they do not help us *do* anything. "But in another way," he writes,

> they are really momentous, because they provide for spaces in which we can live in total freedom. Think of it as a page. The main text is central, it is the text of need, of food and shelter, of daily preoccupations and jobs, keeping things going . . . . The arts are on the margin, and it doesn't bother me to say that they are marginal. What bothers me are the absurd claims we make for them. I want to say the margin is the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for, and mostly seems to suppress . . . . With the arts, people can make a space for themselves, and fill it with intimations of freedom and presence.

Thus, he explains, he wants "to keep in mind the fictiveness of art, and at the same time acknowledge the seriousness which fictiveness does not in any way refute."

But what is this seriousness? Hasn't his conception of the arts as "marginal" already disenfranchised them from anything so weighty? In essence, Professor Donoghue's argument recapitulates Hegel's thesis on the future of art. In his *Lectures on Aesthetics,* Hegel acknowledged that man had traditionally looked to art, as he had looked to religion and philosophy, to reveal "the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind." But he also recognized that the rational shape of our culture has made it increasingly difficult to take art's claim to such truth seriously. "Art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual wants that earlier epochs and peoples have sought in it," he wrote. "The impression that [works of art] make is of a more circumspect nature, and the feelings that they stir within us require a higher test and a further confirmation. Thought and reflection have overtaken the fine arts." This is not to deny that people would continue to make and enjoy art, even investing it with great dignity because of "the intimations of freedom and presence" that aesthetic experience can sometimes grant. But it does render art marginal, exiling it from its traditional role as herald of our "deepest interests." By insisting on the importance of mystery, Professor Donoghue would seem to want to challenge Hegel's analysis; but in fact his conception of art is deeply equivocal, and in the end he may be closer than he realizes to the philosopher's melancholy diagnosis.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A public poet

James Fenton Children in Exile: Poems 1968-1984. Random House, 110 pages, $11.95

reviewed by Robert Richman

Children in Exile: Poems 1968-1984 marks the American debut of James Fenton, a thirty-five-year-old British poet who is also a well-known journalist and critic. The volume contains the bulk of the poet's work to date, including all the poems from the two books *Memory of War* (1982) and *Children in Exile* (1983). To even the casual reader of English poetry Fenton's line of descent from W. H. Auden is unmistakable. The clarity of surface in Fenton's poetry, the crispness of its imagery, the engaging diction of its easy "middle" style, the broad range of subjects (from nonsense poems to love songs to war poems), its political subject matter—these are precisely the qualities that made Auden such a striking new presence in English poetry fifty years ago. Even Fenton's title poem —his "children in exile" are Cambodian refugees living in Italy in the 1970s—suggests a latter-day version of Auden's 1931 poem "The Exiles." That poem was also concerned with the grim "surplus from wars," as Auden put it. Here are two of Fenton's stanzas:

> They have found out: it is hard to escape
> from Cambodia,
> Hard to escape the justice of Pol Pot,
> When they are called to report in dreams to
> their tormentors.
> One night is merciful, the next is not.
>
> I hear a child moan in the next room and I see
> The nightmare spread like rain across his face
> And his limbs twitch in some vestigial combat
> In some remembered place.

Despite this affinity with Auden, however, Fenton's nearest poetic precursor is John Fuller, Fenton's teacher at Oxford. It was once thought that Fuller would be for our period, as Auden was for his, the voice of England—that is, the voice of intellectual, refined, "Oxbridge" England, as opposed to the more provincial England of Philip Larkin or John Betjeman. Fuller certainly has the technical skill required for this position, but he has lacked the requisite note of political topicality. Fenton is not wanting in this regard. His public, political stance, together with his immense technical proficiency, has sealed the pact, so to speak, between Auden and himself. Appropriately, Random House has accorded *Children in Exile* the kind of distinctive "classic" design they reserve for books by Auden and only a very few other poets.

Fenton has been a political and literary journalist for *The New Statesman,* a free-lance reporter in Indochina, and a reporter in Germany for *The Guardian.* Not only have these experiences provided him with the subject matter of many of his poems, but they also seem to have determined the nature of his poetic imagination. Fenton's poetic personality is that of the hard-bitten, intrepid journalist, roughing it in dangerous lands, dispatching news from the front. His poems do not always read as if, in the words of one British reviewer, they were "bulletins from the front line," but there is something about the way he brings journalistic practice to his poetry that gives his work its peculiar quality.

We are given an indication of Fenton's approach to poetry in the quotation from Hobbes's *Leviathan* that precedes the book's first sequence of poems.

> For as at a great distance of place, that which we look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts; and as Voyces grow weak, and inarticulate: so also after great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak; and wee lose (for example) of Cities wee have seen, many particular Streets; and of Actions, many particular Circumstances. This *decaying sense,* when wee would express the thing it self, (I mean *fancy* it selfe,) we call *Imagination,* as I said before: But when we would express the *decay,* and signifie that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Sense is fading, old, and past, it is called Memory. So that *Imagination* and *Memory* are but one thing . . . .

If imagination and memory are "but one thing," then writing—whether the writing of a poem or news story—is really an effort to recover the "particular Circumstances" of the past. For Fenton this means seeking out the lost details embedded in the memory, details he uncovers like a detective uncovering clues. It is expressly *not* the job of the poet, in this view, to go beyond the facts, or to question them, or to allow the imagination to add to them any sort of extra-historical element. The poet's only task is to *reveal* lost facts.

The very first poem of the book, directly across the page from the passage by Hobbes, describes this function of recovery as Fenton conceives it.

> It is not what they built. It is what they
> knocked down.
> It is not the houses. It is the spaces between
> the houses.
> It is not the streets that exist. It is the streets
> that no longer exist.
> It is not your memories which haunt you.
> It is not what you have written down.
> It is what you have forgotten, what you must
> forget.
> What you must go on forgetting all your life.

And he ends the same sequence:

> It is not what he wants to know.
> It is what he wants not to know.
> It is not what they say.
> It is what they do not say.

Because the activity of the imagination is limited to recovering the past, recovering "what you have forgotten," the poet, like the journalist, is always in search of the Big Story. This is certainly the case in Fenton's poetry. Whether the Big Story is actually verfiable and how it can function as both an historical event and poetic construct are questions that Fenton's poetry sidesteps.

Fenton's reliance on "facts"—reportage, documentation, testimony—extends, in "Exempla," to the specialized language of science.

> The genus Stephanoma
> was established by Wallroth in 1833
> on the basis of Stephanoma Strigosum,
> the type of the genus. Wallroth
> described the fungus as possessing
> a pezizaform hairy sporochodium
> with a flattened powdery surface layer
> of globose, vesiculate, hyaline conidia.

The clinical tone is not unusual in Fenton's poetry, and it is very well suited to the presentation of scenes, facts, and memories that purport to be objective truth. Thus, Fenton's poetry is very different from that of the large number of poets who, not wishing to attempt something as momentous and elusive as "objective truth," fall back on a poetry based primarily on personality and private vision. Such poets—against whom Fenton is clearly in revolt—are good or valuable insofar as they persuade us of the universality of their private vision. But they do not attempt to account for historical events with any sort of authority. Yet this is precisely Fenton's goal. It is the same goal, more or less, that Auden set for himself in the Thirties, when he strove to bring poetry back to "reality." It is this goal that chiefly determines—as it did for Auden—the plain-spoken style of the poetry. Fenton's straightforward diction and agreeable clarity do not embody or even describe experience; they simply deliver the message in the most attractive and palatable way possible. This easy style, moreover, helps to suggest that what is being delivered is the unvarnished truth. This is not an easy suggestion for most poets to make, but it is easy for Fenton, a poet who sees his role as not very different from a reporter's.

If Fenton only presented history and the world of facts as the objective truth, this would already constitute a significant revolt against his predecessors. But he goes a step

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

further. He draws moral conclusions from the history he presents. The poems in *Children in Exile* are often icily didactic. These lines are from the title poem:

> They have learnt much. There is much more to learn.
>
> •
>
> It doesn't work like that. It never has done.
> Love is accommodating. It makes space.
>
> •
>
> From five years of punishment for an offence
> It took America five years to commit
> These victim-children have been released on parole
>
> •
>
> For it is we, not they, who cannot forgive America.

As these lines suggest, Fenton's politics are decidedly left-wing. In another poem, "Chosun," he laments the disruption of a city by outsiders, Western outsiders: "No wonder they feared war and hate foreigners . . . . Christians were especially forbidden to enter Chosun . . . the dogs smelled them out, and howled for their martyrdom." "In a Notebook" begins by describing a peaceful and bucolic riverside scene in Indochina. Then the "tide turns" and brings "me to my senses. / The pleasant war brought the unpleasant answers."

> The villages are burnt, the cities void;
> The morning light has left the river view;
> The distant followers have been dismayed;
> And I'm afraid, reading this passage now,
> That everything I knew has been destroyed
> By those whom I admired but never knew;
> The laughing soldiers fought to their defeat
> And I'm afraid most of my friends are dead.

"Dead Soldiers," a mocking firsthand report of an absurdly elegant battlefield lunch with "His Excellency Prince Norodom Chantaraingsey," does not declare any explicit political allegiance, but it is scarcely sympathetic toward Cambodian leaders who, to varying degrees, abetted the American presence in Indochina. The irony of the poem's last lines may well derive from the Left's contention that the United States helped bring about the coup that brought Lon Nol to power in 1970.

> He will tell me how the prince financed the casino
> And how the casino brought Lon Nol to power.
> He will tell me this.
> He will tell me all these things.
> All I must do is drink and listen.

The point of many other poems in *Children in Exile,* however, is less certain. Some are gnomic, even when they take off from historical incidents. But—and the similarity to Auden in this regard is striking—they exhibit at the same time a sort of theatricality. They do not, in other words, arise from mystery and doubt, or any sense of the poet's awe before the facts of history. On the contrary, in Fenton's poems he seems to feel himself in control of history, and thus he is usually unwilling to allow any feelings of doubt or mystery to inspire him. The result is gnomic poems as strategically designed as one could imagine. The subject of "A German Requiem," for example, appears to be the dislocation experienced by many in postwar Germany.

> How comforting it is, once or twice a year,
> To get together and forget the old times.
> As on those special days, ladies and gentlemen,
> When the boiled shirts gather at the graveside
> And a leering waistcoat approaches the rostrum.
> It is like a solemn pact between the survivors.
> The mayor has signed it on behalf of the freemasonry.
> The priest has sealed it on behalf of all the rest.
> Nothing more need be said, and it is better that way—

For all the appeal of these lines as poetry rather than politics, as art rather than history, we feel the same way reading them as we do reading Fenton's more political and didactic lines: an excrutiatingly careful deliberateness lurks behind what seems to be a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

difficult and complex exploration of a complex scene. Thus, the poems invariably end up seeming stagey and contrived, their images chosen for rhetorical appeal alone or for the way they maintain the poem's pose of near-inscrutability.

We are persuaded even more of the deliberate nature of Fenton's poetry when we read such self-evidently dramatic poems as "Vuccerìa."

> Maybe this summer I shall revisit Palermo
> And see if the Shanghai restaurant is still there.
> And if you can still buy cartons of contraband
> Cigarettes in the triangular square
> Beneath. At evening the horses are undressed
> From top to toe, in the nude light-bulbs' glare.
> They leave their skeletons ever so neatly folded
> And piled. Look! there's a pair of socks,
> Crimson with two black clocks.
> Oh no it isn't.
> It's a flayed head on a bedside chair.

This shocking image is reminiscent of another. In an article about Cambodia that Fenton wrote for the British journal *Granta,* he claimed to have eaten a bowl of live ants. Whether or not he actually had, and whether or not he has actually seen a flayed head on a chair, one can't help wondering about the purpose of such scenes—particularly when they appear in poetry. Like Fenton's gnomic phrases and "objective" history, these vignettes strike us as counters in a game devised, not to explore anything new or unknown, but rather to unveil a pre-processed picture drawn for editorial effect.

Because the elements in Fenton's poems are often isolated rhetorical jolts not knit into an organic whole, our sense of what F. R. Leavis called the "decisive inevitability" of poetry's rhythm is often disrupted. Fenton simply exerts too much control over his material, squeezing the life out of it, refusing to allow it to determine, in the smallest way, its own linguistic form.

This is the major risk in writing poetry that wishes to free itself from literariness or aestheticism and take part in the real world. The poet can lose emotional depth and profound generalized feeling when he wishes to deliver a "message" that he considers to be the unequivocal truth. He can gamble away the rich suggestibility of language when he thinks that what he has observed constitutes the object's final, incontrovertible being.

Fenton is too brilliant a craftsman—perhaps one of the best in England today—for this didactic impulse to turn his poetry into anything like a failure. His desire to pull poetry out of its small, self-referential world, moreover, is admirable, no matter what his politics may be. But his poetry's didacticism—and, in the case of his gnomic poems, its staginess—is a serious limitation, creating a body of work too calculated, too deliberate, too all-knowing to have a deep appeal as poetry. In the end, *Children of Exile* illustrates how difficult it is to establish a public poetic voice that does not compromise some of the art form's most salient characteristics and degenerate into smug editorializing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notebook

William Empson: a tribute

by Cleanth Brooks

William Empson first swam into my ken in 1930-31 while I was reading for honors in the English School at Oxford. I cannot remember how I first heard of him: perhaps through his association with I. A. Richards, whose work I had discovered on my arrival at Oxford in the autumn of 1929.

I devoured Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* and his *Practical Criticism.* I was fascinated with what he had to say about the workings of language, and though I did not like his positivism and his psychologistic vocabulary I had to admit that he was telling me more about the inner workings of poetry than I had ever heard anyone tell before.

In the excellently selected open-shelf English literature room in the Bodleian Library, I easily located Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and sat down to read it. But I made the mistake of starting at the first page to read the book through. I quickly became bogged down in Empson's attempt to differentiate between his various kinds of ambiguity and put the book aside.

I did not read it through until 1938. In the meantime I had come home, had begun to teach at the Louisiana State University in 1932, and in 1934 had been joined there by Robert Penn Warren. In 1936 we issued our first textbook, *An Approach to Literature,* in which we offered analyses and discussions of poems, stories, plays, and essays. In 1938 we published *Understanding Poetry,* which employed the methods used in the poetry section of the earlier book.

In the meantime, Warren and I had heard enough about Empson to want to read his *Seven Types of Ambiguity.* By then, however, it was out of print; but I managed to get for us a couple of copies from a second-hand bookseller in London.

This time, I was bowled over by what I found. Here was a critic working along lines original to himself but recognizably parallel to our own, who had a dazzling imagination and a wonderfully deft hand at dealing with the ways in which words worked together to achieve rich and delicate shadings of meaning. If I remember correctly, *Understanding Poetry* was by this time already in galley proof, but fortunately there was sufficient time to include a quotation from *Seven Types of Ambiguity.*

As for Empson's seven types, I could still make little of them. His distinctions among them were vague and wavering, and depended more on the reader's reaction to the poem than to qualities in the poem's structure. But what did it matter? The analyses of actual lines, phrases, and metaphors counted for a great deal. They were always brilliant and usually convincing.

The word *ambiguity,* I concluded, was not happily chosen. It was a term derived from expository prose and suggested a flaw—a muddle to be cleared up. A better term might be *multiple implication* or even Philip Wheelwright's jaw-breaking term, *plurisignification.*

As will be seen, the "methods," if they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Philip Pearlstein

is exclusively represented by

HIRSCHL & ADLER Modern

851 Madison Avenue New York, New York 10021 212 744-6700

can be called that, which were used in *Understanding Poetry* were not derived from Empson but represented a parallel development. Speaking for myself, I had been much influenced by Richards. Warren may also have been, but I suspect that the Fugitives' discussions of their poems and the poems of others in their meetings in the early 1920s also had their influence on Warren, and through him, on me.

Richards was Empson's supervisor of the first part of the English tripos at Cambridge, and his books undoubtedly left their mark on his pupil. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* Empson handsomely expresses his debt to Richards, but he goes on to write: "And I derive the method I am using from Mr. Robert Graves' analysis of a Shakespeare Sonnet, in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry.*"

After Richards took up his post at Harvard, we met for the first time and soon came to know each other. On one occasion Richards filled out for me Empson's account of how he came to write *Seven Types of Ambiguity.* Empson, having just read *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* by Laura Riding and Robert Graves, came up to Richards and said that what Riding and Graves had done with Shakespeare's Sonnet Ninety-four he could do with any other poem. Since thus far Empson had shown himself as no more than a rather aimless and lackadaisical student, Richards replied rather testily: "Then why don't you do that?" To his utter amazement, in a week or so Empson returned with a bulky manuscript, the fruits of his application of the method to a whole cluster of lyric poems. The manuscript was the core of what was to become *Seven Types of Ambiguity.*

From that moment, Empson was a made man in Richards's eyes—as indeed he should have been. As a mere *tour de force, Seven Types of Ambiguity* was a dazzling achievement. But it was much more than that, for its exemplification of techniques for exploring the verbal makeup of poems and the penetrating comments on the poems themselves constituted a permanent contribution to literary criticism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By sheer coincidence, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* came into my hands for review in 1929. I read it with great interest. But the book did not evoke from me the response that it set off in Empson. I was then primarily concerned with what the authors had to say about modernist poetry as such. In the early 1920s Robert Graves had become very interested in John Crowe Ransom's poetry, and there was much friendly correspondence between them. In 1926 Laura Riding, another member of the Fugitive group—the only woman member—went to England and was soon collaborating with Graves, not only in the *Survey,* but in several other books on poetry.

Were these relationships consequential? Do they constitute linkages between the British "close readers" of poetry and their American counterparts? Frankly, I don't know. Perhaps some day a Ph.D. candidate, hungry for an untouched dissertation topic, may want to inquire. I wish him success, but doubt that he can find any decisive evidence. I expect that in addition to a few specific acknowledged influences, such as that of Richards on myself, the answer may be as simple as this: after a long season of inquiry into sources, cultural influences, and biography, the times were ripe for a renewed (though much intensified) attention to the verbal content of literary works.

At this point I should point out that Empson (like many of the rest of us) had interests that took him beyond the inner detail of a literary work. Such interests appear even in *Seven Types of Ambiguity.* For example, Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" provokes Empson to comment on the fact that "eighteenth-century England had no scholarship system or *carrière overtes aux talents.*" There is no explicit reference to this in the poem, and it is far from certain that Gray gave it a thought: he probably simply accepted this situation as the normal order of things. But this is just my point: Empson is constantly moving outside the poem.

In *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), published in this country as *English Pastoral Poetry,* his concern for cultural and historical issues becomes paramount. For instance, he firmly sets *Alice in Wonderland* in its Victorian context, and the oddly assorted creatures that, along with Alice, make their way out of the pool of tears suggest to Empson a muffled allusion to Darwin's theories of evolution.

The connections are daringly speculative, but usually ingenious and often convincingly pertinent. *Some Versions of Pastoral* is my favorite of Empson's books. But I must not imply that his interests in the cultural bearings of literary works had by this time supplanted his interest in literary theory. The very title of the book refutes any such supposition, for in using the term *pastoral,* Empson gives it a new and precise meaning. He discards the traditional trappings, sheep and shepherd's pipes and crooks, in favor of a genre definition that goes to the heart of the matter. In pastoral, the writer uses a character less complex than himself or than his typical reader. He does this in order to give a view of our complex world from a fresh and often illuminating perspective. Thus, his chapter on *Alice in Wonderland* is titled "The Child as Swain." The child's uninhibited gaze illumines and often unmasks the pretenses of the adult world. It is an extremely useful definition. In the light of this definition we may regard *Huckleberry Finn* as a pastoral.

Empson's *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951) is of all his books the most elaborately thought out and worked out. But the very diversity of Empson's interests, which gives vitality and body to *English Pastoral Poetry* seems to me to beget confusion in *Complex Words.* As W. K. Wimsatt and I put it in *Literary Criticism: A Short History,* "Empson's inveterate psychologism constantly makes him put such questions as these: Why would a reader of such and such a kind find this ambiguous? What historical circumstances make the 16th-century reader, say, prone to take this rather than that as the primary reading? . . . Empson's interest sometimes seems to be merely a curiosity as to what could be made of a particular passage if he simply gave his mind to the search for puz-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

zles." In this regard he seems to anticipate some of our current literary theorists—those, for example, who specialize in reader-oriented criticism.

Yet finally Wimsatt and I had to agree that in Empson's work the cognitive principle is never completely overwhelmed. What Empson regarded as "valuable ambiguity" adds richness and complexity to the meaning rather than throwing the meaning into doubt. Perhaps I should say that the limitations I find in *Complex Words* do no more than reveal my own limitations.

In 1940 Warren and I succeeded in securing an article by Empson for *The Southern Review,* which we were then editing. It was entitled "Honest Man." It is a brilliant study of the chameleon-like tonal colorations of the only apparently forthright word "honest," as it is moved out of one contextual field into another. We would cheerfully have used more of his work in the *Review* had we been able to come by it.

While we were negotiating for the essay, Empson was in China, and I tried to persuade him to travel from China to New York by a southern route so that we might have a visit from him, but Baton Rouge was too far off the beaten track. Thus I did not meet Empson until the summer of 1948, when we were both on the faculty of John Ransom's newly founded School of Letters at Kenyon College.

We were given rooms in close proximity in one of the older buildings. There were thus opportunities for talk, and we did have some conversations during those eight weeks. But I found him a very difficult man to know. He was not only shy, but, like many of the young Englishmen that I remember from my Oxford days, inhibited, bottled up inside himself. Often only a long acquaintance would open up these reticent Englishmen or, in the proper hour, enough alcohol. I had heard that Empson went in for drinking, but I never saw any evidence of it; and though we got to be on amicable terms, at Kenyon I never felt that I knew him.

He was a poet, and I would like to comment on his poetry, but I find that I have little to say. His poetry had character. It wasn't like anybody else's. The phrasing was often brilliant. Contrary to what one might have expected from his carefully analytic prose, the poetry seemed bardic and rhapsodic. This was one of the oddities of this fascinating man. But for some reason—probably my fault—I must regretfully own that his poetry never really spoke to me.

I return to Empson's contradictions and oddities. He was a compendium of them. I'm told that he was of a solid, even staid, Yorkshire family. Yet he was quietly but firmly rebellious. He wrote a book in praise of Milton but deploring what he held to be Milton's demonic God. His politics were distinctly leftish. He admired China and what the revolutionaries were preparing to make of it. Though he greatly admired Richards as his old friend and master, he had no compunction in pointing out where the master had gone astray. In sum, he was the independent, very much his own man, even to a whimsical degree. I see him as a worthy member of that noble band of eccentrics that England has produced through the last two and a half centuries.

I take it that his work is at the moment out of fashion. But then, the literary world is notoriously given to fads and fashions. What is of importance is the very solid achievement that he has left it. If the generations to come neglect that, they have impoverished none but themselves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A certain air of seriousness"

by Bruce Bawer

This summer, in affiliation with the Book-of-the-Month Club and something called Creative Television Associates, PBS perpetrated a twelve-part series called "First Edition," which took as its subject the wonderful world of contemporary American letters. The hosts were John Leonard, for many years *The New York Times*'s house expert on books, culture, and agonized white male sensitivity and awareness, and Nancy Evans, a tony young book reviewer for *Glamour* who was born to play Tracy Lord in *The Philadelphia Story*. Also on hand, as a sort of public-TV version of Andy Rooney of "Sixty Minutes," was Book-of-the-Month-Club judge Clifton Fadiman, the eighty-year-old critic, editor, and alumnus of *The New Yorker* and the radio quiz show "Information Please."

But the indisputable star of "First Edition" was Mr. Leonard—John, to us viewers. It's amazing. The man looks just like a thousand other mild-mannered, highly literate middle-aged Manhattanites with neatly trimmed beards and turtleneck sweaters and hunting jackets. But stick a few pages of his own prose in front of him, push him toward a camera, and he acts as if he were Montgomery Clift. What intensity! What electricity! Reading his copy aloud, he caressed each word, nearly strangled it, his voice cracking, body quavering, eyes burning and crossed as he stared intently into the camera lens, looking like he was going to break into tears at any moment because his fragile passion for the writer he was talking about was just too much for him. Or perhaps he was simply torn apart by the sound of his own prose. Which is understandable. For how could anyone *not* be discomposed by the likes of this:

> [Max Apple's] characters and his states of mind visit Disney World, the Girl Scouts and the Astrodome, the CIA and primal therapy, a movie set and a pizza parlor and a piano bar; Pac-Man and Alaska and the national debt. They jog, buy yogurt, drink beer, root for the Detroit Tigers, read the *National Geographic* and *The National Inquirer,* fish for the dead through holes in the ice, think about horses and dental floss and sex and carbohydrates and Andrew Carnegie and Eugene V. Debs and add themselves up all wrong on their pocket calculators. They have transplanted hearts and in their ears they hear the sound of the national anthem and Rice Krispies. They are plucky, bewildered Americans, stuck in a discrepant space between history and faith, breakfast and dreams. They miss their mother and so make many jokes, play many games with language and emotion and sacred text, poker-faced for keeps. On Judgment Day they will be represented by the best of New York law firms, batting clean-up. Unreconciled to the bad news of this century, they find enchantment in the contemplation of Yellow Cabs, Reggie Jackson, the pituitary gland, the library.

True, it doesn't make too much sense, par-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ticularly when you hear it only once on television, and it doesn't illuminate its subject so much as draw attention to itself. But gosh, isn't it *relevant*? Isn't it *poetic*? And look at the man *suffer!*

And so there he was at the beginning of each episode of "First Edition," framed in an unnervingly tight Big-Brother close-up, warbling yet another heartfelt, perplexing panegyric in praise of yet another Guest Author of the Week. There were twelve Guest Authors, one per show, and John had something heartfelt and perplexing to say about every last one of them. About Mailer: "So shape-changing, so nineteenth-century in his appetite for the facts and the night, the texture and the magic, is the one we've asked here to explain himself and his literature. We will be asking him his own question: What indeed did Picasso teach us if not that every form offers up its own scream when it is torn?" (They never *did* ask him that, darn it.) About Updike, that "one-man academy of the arts": "John Updike proposes a kind of nostalgia for the future, a future that seems to recede, like God, when we most need it. In *Rabbit is Rich* the dead look up from beneath the ice, while in the winter we run for our lives hoping that if God can't save us, maybe sex will do the job." And about our own American Nobel Laureate:

> Saul Bellow studied anthropology and sociology, and these disciplines weren't big enough to contain either his amazing, scourging sense of humor or the complicated things he had to say about the Jewish romance with America, alienation and ambivalence in sex, homelessness and howling like a wolf from the city window, the degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding, meeting the terms of one's contract, gangsters, and intellectuals.

After John had gotten the proceedings under way in this fashion, the camera panned to Nancy, whose praise for the Author of the Week was a bit more direct: "Philip Roth has said of Updike, 'He's the best writer of us all,' and there are few who would dispute that . . . ." Or: "Although Saul Bellow may have reservations about his earlier work, he is one of the few authors whose every book . . . is mandatory reading for the serious reader of fiction. His consistent seriousness of purpose, laced with an arch sense of the human comedy, has been recognized."

Serious reader. Seriousness of purpose. That, above all, was what "First Edition" was really about—seriousness. With every word, gesture, expression, John and Nancy hammered it home: this was not some frivolous talk show, they were not the usual bubbleheaded professional TV personalities, the Author of the Week was not some best-selling hack. They were here on serious business—to probe the nature of literary art, to get the Great Author "to explain himself and his literature." Oddly enough, though, when you stripped away the subordinate clauses, most of their questions amounted to vintage cocktail-party material. How does it feel to get a bad review? How do you decide whether to write a story or a novel? Where do you get your ideas? "Were you born with this ear [for dialogue] or did you start listening better?"—Nancy to Elmore Leonard. The most frequently asked question was: How do you feel about being a celebrity? Mailer revealed that his fame is a burden, because he's a serious writer who wants to sit home and write serious books; Bellow explained that it's hard to be a public figure and a "man of genius" at the same time.

That was about as revealing as it got. The celebrities' answers, in general, were less interesting than their behavior in the company of John and Nancy. Bellow was sardonic and wary, Updike tired and amiable, William Kennedy shy and soft-spoken, Toni Morrison warm and garrulous, Mailer bombastic but controlled. Bellow lectured, Updike chatted, Kennedy murmured, Morrison poured out her heart, Mailer made pronouncements. And throughout it all Nancy was aglow with a Revlon-girl smile and John sat there brooding and staring and nodding

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and looking pensive and occasionally doing something like this: Mailer was talking about his books of journalism, and John interrupted him to say that a book like *The Armies of the Night* "is not journalism at all. It's social history—*written in blood.*" What a conversation stopper! The way he wrung out those last three words, the tortured look on his face—why, even the existential hero of the March on the Pentagon didn't know how to respond.

Once the Interview of the Week was over, there was (on some episodes) an apparently unscripted segment called "Insights" in which John and Nancy, alone now, discussed what they had just learned about the art of literature. Ruminating over William Kennedy's remarks about the writer's choice of form, John told Nancy: "I just have this feeling that what writers do is they hear the voices, they work on the material, and if they're any good at all, it becomes clear that it has to be done *this* way." (Well, you had to be there. It *sounded* profound.) And after the conversation with Toni Morrison, Nancy brought up John's "provocative" theory that "it's young women who are trailblazing in fiction." John gave us some names: Alice Walker, Anne Tyler, Ann Beattie. "It doesn't seem to me," he said, his synapses ablaze, "that they're just writing about being *women.*" But then, of course, having unloaded this perception, he went on speaking of them as women. They're "suppressed voices," their books are "signals from a submerged continent." An approving Nancy did her part: "Women are being *serious* about the act of writing . . . . And I think they are taking their craft quite *seriously.*" Talk about your insights!

"First Edition" wasn't advertised as a political program, but John and Nancy turned it into one now and then nonetheless. They seemed to be happier this way. Their best chance usually came with "In Review," the program's closing segment. On one episode, Nancy reviewed a book called *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* by Paula Giddings. The feminist standard-bearers Germaine Greer, Susan Brownmiller, and Betty Friedan, Nancy observed, have all turned into reactionaries lately, and "in this flat, backward-looking climate, it's thrilling to come upon an impassioned piece of feminist scholarship that breaks new ground." Apparently unaware that some people might consider the phrase "impassioned scholarship" to be something of an oxymoron, Nancy went on to declare Giddings's book "a landmark study that anyone with a conscience should consider required reading . . . . It will send chills down your spine, like the first time you heard Martin Luther King."

Even more fervent was John's review of *Exile: The Unquiet Oblivion of Richard M. Nixon* by Robert Sam Anson. Nixon, John said, is an eternal mystery: "Nixon's face . . . is a moon in the American night, and we will never find his center, a bat cave." But we can't help wanting to find his center, even though

> there may be something wrong, something obscene about our fascination. I wanted *more.* As if a shape was bound to appear out of the mound of words. But there is *no more.* Norman Mailer himself is just as greedy as I am to know. Mailer calls Nixon "the Eisenstein of the mediocre and the inert." But he handles his body like an adolescent suffering excruciations of self-consciousness with every move. Nixon is back. He never went away. Government by Jack-in-the-Box. Surprise! Guess what Daddy brought home from the office? A secret bombing of Cambodia! The book, its author, its subject, and this reader, are full of bland uneasiness.

Nancy's one-word reaction to this: "Bravo." (They get along very well.)

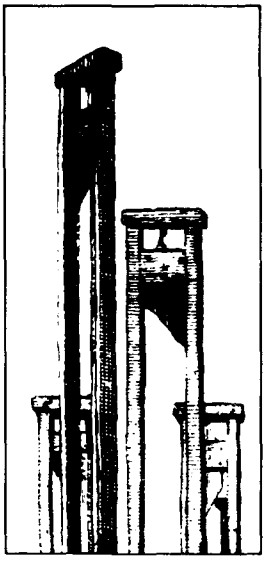
Best of all, though, was the closing segment of the Updike episode, in which both John and Nancy conspired to steer the ship off course. It started with a review by a tie-and-jacket-clad Nancy of Updike's new novel, *The Witches of Eastwick.* Having flashed her Cover-Girl smile at the author

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Poet Assassinated and Other Stories

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Translated by Ron Padgett ▪ *Fifteen stories now available to English readers for the first time, in addition to the celebrated novella "The Poet Assassinated."* ▪ *"These stories make it easy to see why the Surrealists chose Apollinaire as a precursor."* LIBRARY JOURNAL ▪ *Paper, $12.50*



Products of the Perfected Civilization

CHAMFORT

Translated and with an Introduction by W. S. Merwin

"North Point Press once again has reprinted an essential volume for the Francophile's library. After LaRochefoucauld, Chamfort is the most attractively bitter, sharp-tongued and wise commentator on the human comedy who chose to work in the brief compass of the aphorism." THE WASHINGTON POST BOOK WORLD ▪ *Paper, $12.50*

NORTH POINT PRESS, *850 Talbot Avenue*
Berkeley, California 94706

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through an entire interview, she now bared her claws and tore into his book. "Underneath the smooth talk," Nancy proclaimed, "lies *sexism.*" The book was a "tasteless" love letter to "bourgeois bliss." A dejected John concurred. "What is so dismaying," he lamented, his voice reed-thin and trembling, "is when a writer that you really like and a writer who is very good behaves wickedly. And this is a wicked book."

They proceeded to discuss the matter. John was *very* agonized—fingers on lips, eyes on the floor. "It's not new," he said about Updike's sexism. "Something weird is going on." Nancy said she hadn't seen anything like it since "the old days" of *The Prisoner of Sex.* John said, "Mailer's gonna do the same thing. Women end up in his new novel as severed heads in bags in the river . . . . Something is going on. I wish I knew what it was." He posited a connection between these wicked new books and some current television shows. "Every new adventure program, with the single exception of 'Remington Steele,' is based on the buddy-buddy beach bum or helicopter-flying . . . *jerks,* and all the women are bikini-clad bimbos." The implicit message in all this, he said, was that men were saying "'we've had enough, we don't want to hear any more about you, we don't want to hear any more about your struggles, we don't want to hear any more about your sensitivity, we don't want to wash the dishes, and now we're gonna get back.' I'm flummoxed." So flummoxed, in fact, that he was at a loss for words. Nancy suggested that "women have been quiet these past few years" and that "by this silence were encouraging these books to come out now." John, with sad, bitter irony: "'Break their knees if you can't go any higher.' That's it for 'First Edition.' I'm John Leonard." "And I'm Nancy Evans."

Slipped in somewhere among these chunks of literary chatter was Fadiman's little piece of the show, "Uncommontary." Predictably, there was nothing uncommon about it: Fadiman played pundit emeritus, delivering mildly cantankerous, inconsequential little essays about the distinction between literary criticism and book reviewing; about the boom in the short story; about books versus non-books; about four writers who should get the Nobel Prize (Greene, Borges, Graves, Braudel). Fadiman, who has the anthologist's predilection for making lists, named his nine great literary critics and his twenty-five (actually twenty-six) "active, interesting American and Canadian short story writers." He praised Aristotle's "first-rate mind" and decried *The Jane Fonda Workout Book.* "A certain air of seriousness," he complained, "used to cling to the very idea of a book."

And "a certain air of seriousness" was, when you get down to it, the principal commodity that "First Edition" was intended to deliver. The program was only the latest in a long line of pseudo-cultural offerings from PBS designed not for people with a real interest in culture—literary or otherwise—but for people who like to think they have an interest in it, and who will dutifully watch a show that promises to raise their Culture Quotient, so long as it doesn't demand any more of them than Merv does. "The little they have to say," Fadiman observed of non-book authors Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons, "could be contained in a pamphlet." He might justly, I'm afraid, have made a similar observation about "First Edition."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pierre matisse gallery

in new york since 1932 at 41 east 57

balthus	1938 · 39 · 49 · 57 · 62 · 67 · 77
butler	1959 · 62 · 73
calder	1934 · 36 · 37 · 40 · 41 · 42 · 43
chagall	1941 · 42 · 44 · 45 · 46 · 47 · 48 · 68 · 68 · 69 · 72 · 73 · 75 · 79 · 81 · 82
chirico	1935 · 40
dubuffet	1947 · 47 · 47 · 48 · 50 · 51 · 52 · 54 · 56 · 58 · 59 · 78
giacometti	1948 · 50 · 58 · 61 · 64
lam	1942 · 44 · 45 · 48 · 50 · 82
mac iver	1940 · 44 · 49 · 56 · 61 · 66 · 70 · 81
matta	1942 · 44 · 45 · 46 · 47
millares	1965 · 74
miró	1932 · 33 · 35 · 36 · 38 · 39 · 40 · 41 · 42 · 44 · 45 · 45 · 47 · 48 · 49 · 50 · 51 · 51 · 53 · 56 · 58 · 59 · 61 · 63 · 65 · 67 · 70 · 72 · 73 · 73 · 75 · 76 · 76 · 78 · 80 · 83
riopelle	1954 · 56 · 69 · 74 · 74 · 77
roszak	1962 · 74
rouan	1976 · 82 · 84
saura	1961 · 64 · 71
tanguy	1939 · 42 · 43 · 45 · 46 · 50 · 63
zao wou-ki	1980

major one-man exhibitions since 1932

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Synchromist Abstraction, c. 1913. Oil on canvas, 12¼ x 9¼ inches

The Estate of

Morgan Russell

is represented by

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc.

22 East 80 Street New York, NY 10021 Tel (212) 879-6606

Gallery hours: Monday-Saturday, 10-5:30

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATTI HANSEN

MANHATTAN REFLECTION

PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

Manhattan Reflection, 1984. Oil on canvas, 84 x 76 inches.

SEPTEMBER 20 — OCTOBER 13, 1984

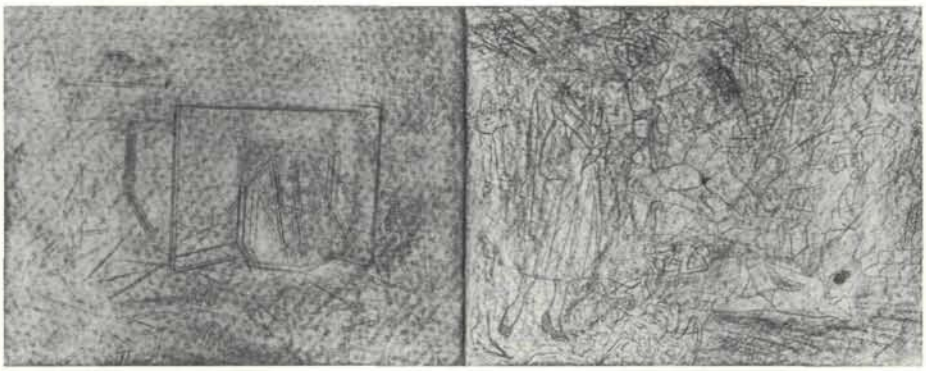
ARMSTRONG

GALLERY/HARRIET LEBISH, DIRECTOR
50 WEST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10019

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOSEPH NECHVATAL

Sculpture and Drawings/September 18th through October 13th, 1984



Memories, 1982, oil stick and graphite on paper, 11 x 28 inches.

BROOKE ALEXANDER, INC.

20 West 57th Street New York, New York 10019 Telephone 212/757-3721

WILLIAM CLUTZ: 16-page color catalogue available for forthcoming exhibition: New Pastels: Chicago & Los Angeles. Introduction by Janice C. Oresman. Send $10 pp. Illustrated: Morning By the Ocean, pastel on paper; 29½"x40½", 1984, detail.

TATISTCHEFF

TATISTCHEFF

50 WEST 57 ST · NEW YORK 10019 · (212) 664-0907

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George L.K. Morris

Indians Fighting, *1935, 17⅜" x 13," collage.*

MEREDITH LONG & CO.

Dealers in 19th & 20th Century American Art

2323 San Felipe · Houston, Texas 77019 · (713) 523-6671

Tuesday–Saturday, 10–6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arthur B. Carles, *Nude with Bouquet*, c.1914, oil on canvas, 44¾ x 57⅜ inches

PAINTINGS BY ARTHUR B. CARLES SEPTEMBER 12 - OCTOBER 27

WASHBURN GALLERY 42 EAST 57TH STREET NEW YORK

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 503
New York NY 10019

Second Class Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

DGOLDZP15CL27ZA 08/31/84
PHILIP GOULD
15 CLAREMONT AVE
NEW YORK, NY 10027

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED